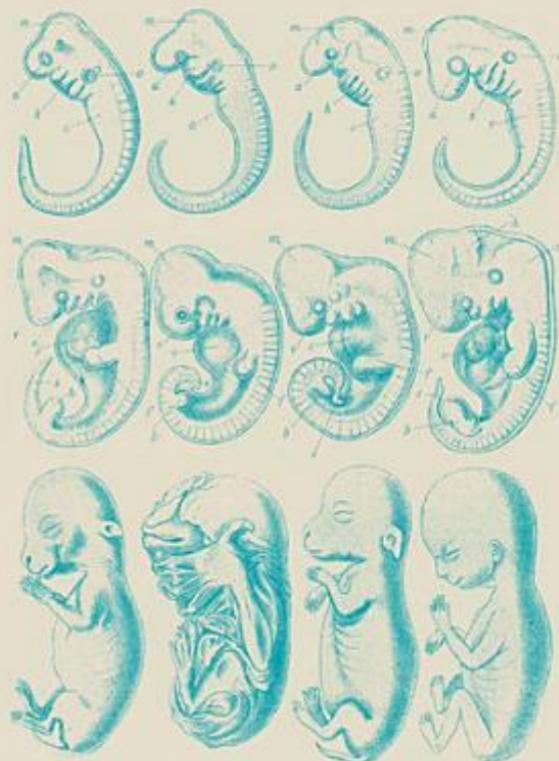


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between
the
HUMAN
and
the
ANIMAL

Heidegger's Metaphysical Abyss

BETH CYKOWSKI

Heidegger's Metaphysical Abyss

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Heidegger's Metaphysical Abyss

Between the Human and the Animal

BETH CYKOWSKI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2021

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020941711

ISBN 978-0-19-886540-7

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198865407.001.0001

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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To my beloved son, Cassian

May we talk of a 'higher' and a 'lower' at all in the realm of what is essential? Is the essence of man higher than the essence of the animal? All this is questionable even as a question.

Martin Heidegger

The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995 [1929–30])

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Introduction

Heidegger and the Question of the Animal

The aim of this book is to provide a critical analysis of Heidegger's reflections on animality. These reflections are presented most extensively in his 1929–30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (*FCM*), so this text will be my primary focus. In these lectures Heidegger poses three provocative metaphysical theses: the human, Heidegger claims, is 'world-forming' (*weltbildend*), the animal is 'poor in world' (*weltarm*), and the stone—the mere object—is 'worldless' (*weltlos*).¹ Via a close examination of *FCM*, one that also draws on other places within Heidegger's corpus where the theme of animality features, I intend to clarify the true meaning, scope, and significance of these theses.

Why are Heidegger's reflections on animals significant, within and beyond Heidegger scholarship? In the current molecular-genetic age, in which the human genome has been decoded and the human is embedded more deeply than ever within a biological continuum, questions pertaining to any kind of *essential*, metaphysical distinction between the human and the non-human animal appear obsolete. The twenty-first century is perhaps one in which there is no longer a question pertaining exclusively to the human: even to attempt to place the human within its own category, one that fundamentally omits non-human animals, is to reinvoke a dubious pre-Enlightenment ontology.

Contemporary readers of Heidegger have generally responded along these lines to Heidegger's theses concerning human 'world-formation' and animal 'world-poverty', and have often done so with vehement criticism.² The theses forge an 'abyss of essence' between human and non-human organisms; Heidegger appears to be using them to establish an ontotheological hierarchy that places the human at the top, in spite of the fact that his work

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: ch. 3, p. 185).

² e.g. Derrida (1989, 2011); Franck (1991); Krell (1992, 2013); Haar (1993b); Jonas (1994); Glendinning (1998); MacIntyre (1999); Aho (2009).

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is usually suspicious of the metaphysical divisions and dualisms that we have inherited. Heidegger's propositions, it is argued in the secondary literature, undermine scientific developments by breaking apart the biological continuum in order to secure the human within its own unique category, all the while leaving the world-poor animal on the other side of the abyss. In so doing Heidegger reinstates an outmoded dualism that he ought, on his own terms, to renounce: human versus animal.

Is Heidegger's account of animality as straightforward as this? Even a brief glance at his reflections on animals gives way to a cascade of complex questions. What, precisely, is the nature of the abyss that Heidegger forges between the human and the rest of life? And does he, in fact, forge it himself, and in so doing endorse it, or does he rather observe the manner in which it has been forged throughout the history of metaphysics and empirical science? And what kind of dimensions does the abyss that he insists upon have? Is Heidegger suggesting that, while, at an ontic-scientific level, human beings share organic processes and traits with animals, their capacity to 'take issue' with being and, as he puts it in *FCM*, 'form' a world pushes them ontologically, if not ontically, out of the 'natural' domain? Or is he making an even stronger claim: that the human is wholly and utterly 'other' than the animal, that it is separate and essentially 'disincarnated', to borrow from Didier Franck's rendering of Heidegger's position, and that no amount of analysis or empirical discovery can ever really reconcile it with nature?³

While both of these positions have been attributed to Heidegger, most commentators on his reflections on animality tend to see at least the threat of the latter more uncompromising approach: a deep and intractable abyss that flies in the face of our more refined contemporary concepts concerning nature as a biological continuum that includes the human. I aim to show that, while Heidegger's animal analysis does indeed institute an ontological hierarchy between the human and the animal, it does not have the naively humanistic implications that have thus far disturbed commentators. His claims regarding the abyss between the human and the animal conceive of a hierarchy of both an ontological, essential kind, and an ontic-scientific kind; these hierarchies, however, serve a heuristic and investigative, rather than an absolute and didactic, function in his writing.

The 'standard' reading of the lectures is somewhat superficial, insofar as it divorces the sections on animals from their wider context, both within

³ Franck (1991:146).

Heidegger's lecture course and within the metaphysical and scientific climate of his time. Far from being a hackneyed metaphysical ordering and valorisation of life, for Heidegger the concept of a metaphysical abyss between human and animal is the expression of a deep-seated inherited prejudice concerning a division between 'life' and 'spirit'. Heidegger argues in *FCM*, as well as in *Being and Time*, that this division separates the realm of the 'natural' from that of the peculiarly human.⁴ The human, throughout history, has been thought of as 'life plus' some other property: reason, intellect, language, all of which come under the title 'spirit'. Via a genealogical analysis, Heidegger's lecture course locates the origin of these two categories in ancient Greek thought: prior to the establishment of individual philosophical disciplines—logic (*logos*), ethics (*ēthos*), and the philosophy of nature (*physis*)—the Greeks encountered human existence as that part of nature that 'speaks out' about nature as a whole.⁵ In this sense, Heidegger argues, the human was seen an *essentially* proto-philosophical, metaphysical being—that is, a vessel via which nature, understood as *physis*, 'goes beyond' itself in order to bring about its own articulation.⁶

With the establishment of Plato's Academy, Heidegger argues, disciplinary divisions led to an abandonment of the more primordial understanding: the concept of the human as the being that speaks out of *physis* from within it was reconfigured in terms of a divide between 'nature' and 'man'.⁷ *Physis* became *bios*, 'life', and *logos* and *ēthos* were reinterpreted as 'spirit'. Life and spirit evolved into distinct categories to be studied on their own terms, and by the twentieth century these categories had been ossified: life is now the domain of biology, and spirit the domain of anthropology, disciplines that, Heidegger argues throughout the lecture course, are divorced from their own metaphysical origins. Heidegger wishes to illuminate these origins, first so that we can discover the metaphysics contained within contemporary ontic science, and, secondly, so that we can steer ourselves back to the primordial understanding of the Greeks, which, as he claims in *FCM*, sees the human not as a pinnacle of nature but as a kind of 'rupturing' within nature, insofar as it is always embedded within and tied to the nature about which it speaks. The self-rupturing that occurs when the human speaks out about *physis* from within it means that it necessarily remains unknown to itself, estranged from its own essence. Heidegger articulates this

⁴ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §18; see also 1962 [1927]: §10).

⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §10).

⁶ *Ibid.*, §8b), p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §10.

estrangement, and its philosophical potency, by drawing on Novalis's statement that 'philosophy is really homesickness'.⁸

The standard reception of Heidegger's reflections on animality under-emphasises this wider metaphysical context. It also detaches Heidegger's reflections from the anthropology and biology of his time, to which he is responding in the lectures. The standard reading therefore misses the fact that Heidegger's theses on the human/animal distinction derive their positive content from this biology and anthropology. We find, in these disciplines, an account of the human as peculiarly detached from the instincts that bind other animals to their environments. The biologist Jakob von Uexküll writes that the animal's world may be confined, 'impoverished' by the limitations of its sensory field, but precisely these limitations grant the animal a 'certainty' that the human, with its comparatively weak instincts and extreme openness to the world, appears to be denied.⁹ This view, reiterated in the German philosophical anthropologists of the early twentieth century, who describe the human as 'dangerously' vulnerable to the contingencies of the world rather than enclosed within a single habitat, retains the idea of an abyss between human and animal.¹⁰

In *FCM* Heidegger interacts deeply with the life sciences of his time because, as he aims to show, these sciences can be regarded as ontic gateways to deeper, ontological modes of questioning. As a result of the metaphysics implicit in the sciences, concepts that are concealed within their foundations, biology and anthropology have produced a conception of life and human life that is reflected in the propositions that the animal is 'poor in world' and the human is 'world-forming'. If we turn towards this metaphysics, an exercise that demands that we first 'awaken' the 'fundamental attunement', the basic 'mood' of the contemporary epoch, we find the relic of the philosophically more curious, more profound view of the human's position within *physis* embodied in Greek thought. This more primordial philosophical comportment has been appropriated historically in terms of a subject/object dualism, but Heidegger seeks to show that it is in fact far more subtle, ambiguous, and complex. He presents his three theses as a kind of philosophical provocation that, broadly speaking, we can respond to in one of two ways. On the one hand, we can interpret them as the advancing of a tripartite hierarchy of beings, one that affirms traditional dualisms (subject versus world, soul versus body, life versus inert matter). Or, we can respond

⁸ Cited in Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §2b), p. 5.

⁹ Uexküll (2010 [1934]: 51).

¹⁰ e.g. Gehlen (1988 [1940]); Scheler (2002 [1928]); Plessner (2019 [1928]).

to them as statements that challenge us to question what is really at stake in these inherited dualisms and concepts about our position within nature. Thus far, most scholars have approached Heidegger's theses as a provocation in the former sense. They have marvelled at what they regard as the reinstitution of dualisms that are unacceptable on Heidegger's own terms. However, I will aim to show that Heidegger intended his provocation to point beyond the vestiges of these dualisms back to a more essential way of philosophising. Though the nature and context of his statements concerning animals alter throughout his work, I wish to argue that, even in later, stronger iterations of his animal thesis, Heidegger's intention is to examine and illuminate, rather than simply to repeat, the orthodox metaphysical hierarchies that we have inherited.

Heidegger's 'Abyssal Distinction' between the Human and the Animal

The nuances of Heidegger's arguments in favour of an abyss separating the human from the animal alter; the abyss expands and contracts within a certain margin over the course of his works, but it remains intact for the duration of his intellectual life. Heidegger's use of the term 'abyssal' (*abgrundig*), which first appears in relation to the human/animal distinction in the 1920s and is used repeatedly thereafter, is intended in two senses. First, he describes the distinction between the human and the animal as 'abyssal' in the sense of a deep chasm: the difference between these two modes of being is unfathomable, perhaps impossible to traverse, regardless of the efforts of the natural and human sciences. Secondly, the distinction is torturous in this unfathomability; it is, as he notes in *Letter on Humanism*, 'scarcely conceivable', disquieting, and literally 'abyssmal' to behold.¹¹

When we consider that which is animal in us, we are encountering our intersection with nature, with *physis* understood as the unified domain of beings of which we are a part. The human is the being, as Heidegger claims in *Being and Time*, for whom 'being' as such is an issue, the being that possesses linguistic freedom, the being that anticipates its own death, the being that is flung into an intimate encounter with its own radical temporality, the being that, as Heidegger goes on to say in *FCM*, 'exists' rather than

¹¹ Heidegger (1977 [1946]: 230).

'merely lives'.¹² However, this mode of being nevertheless incorporates a brute materiality: 'procreation, birth, childhood, maturing, aging [and] death', Heidegger says, are processes that, at a certain level, bind all living beings together, and are ones that include the human: 'man experiences [these] in himself'.¹³ The human, the being that 'clears' and 'discloses', that 'speaks' both into and out of *physis*, is a factual thing comprising flesh and blood. The factual vehicle of the human's disclosive capacities is a cluster of organs that age and eventually decay. These natural processes 'belong to the general prevailing of beings', and the human, regardless of its singular disposition to take issue with being, is not exempt from them.¹⁴ For Heidegger this claim does not, I wish to argue, amount to a basic assumption that the human's embodiedness can be categorised in the same way as animal anatomy. The claim is instead an anti-Cartesian attempt to include, incorporate, and implicate life in the question of what *Dasein* is. The decisive focus of Heidegger's thinking on animals is not an ethological study of different animal species, but rather a metaphysical investigation into the idea of 'animality', one that, I will argue, invites us to approach the question of our own animality. Heidegger attends to the question of how we can think about animals, given that they are beings that we encounter from our own human perspective, a perspective that is necessarily subject to our own factual limitations, the coordinates of our 'being-in-the-world'. Heidegger's abyss between the human and the animal, which I will address in this book, arises as a result of this line of questioning.

Though Heidegger's discussion of his theses concerning the human as world-forming and the animal as world-poor is a distinctive feature of *FCM*, particularly when it comes to his detailed ontic-scientific analysis, the content of the theses can be traced elsewhere in his works. The theses are anticipated during the 1920s and, in a sense, radicalised in later publications. In his 1924 lecture course on Aristotle we see the beginnings of a conception of the human as 'world-forming' by virtue of its capacity to 'make beings manifest', to discern 'the beneficial and the harmful', via its capacity to speak the *logos*, and to construct 'household and *polis*'.¹⁵ However, Heidegger seems far more inclined in this earlier work to bring the animal into a close proximity to the human. There is evidence in this text of a concern for life and animality that places the human and the animal more assuredly on what appears to be an ontological, not just an ontical continuum. Early on in

¹² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §50, p. 210).

¹⁵ Heidegger (2009 [1924]: §9a), p. 33).

¹³ *Ibid.*, §8a), p. 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the lecture course Heidegger endorses the original Greek interpretation of the human as *zōon logon echon*, which, unlike its more superficial Latinisation *animal rationale*, sees the human ‘not only philosophically but in concrete living’.¹⁶ The ‘concrete living’ of the human, its factual ‘animateness’, is an explicit concern in this early phase of Heidegger’s thought. Storey notes that, prior to *Being and Time*, the question of ‘animality’ for Heidegger was more a question of ‘that which animates’, the self-movement of living beings, which includes Dasein, and which prefigures Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s everyday being-in-the-world:

In seizing on the peculiar movement of prereflective factual life, Heidegger believed he was uncovering a stratum of being long neglected by the tradition that had first been worked over by Aristotle, and his creative appropriation of this stratum would lead to his famed conception of being-in-the-world, which was developed in close concert with considerations of life and animality.¹⁷

Heidegger thus ascribes more to the animal in this early work than in *FCM* and beyond. He even suggests, at certain points, that plants possess a degree of openness to world, albeit of a highly restricted kind.¹⁸ These ontologically more generous statements seem surprising from the perspective of *FCM*’s insistence on animal world-poverty:

A living thing is not simply at hand [*vorhanden*], but is in a world in that it has its world. An animal is not simply moving down the road, pushed along by some mechanism. It is in the world in the sense of having it.¹⁹

And, a little later, we see the suggestion of a further kinship with animals:

Animals and humans are not at hand next to one another, but are with one another, and (in the case of humans) they express themselves reciprocally. Self-expressing as speaking about... is the *basic mode of the being of life*, namely, of being-in-a-world.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., §5b), p.14.

¹⁷ Storey (2015: 38).

¹⁸ Heidegger (1995 [1925–6]: §16, p. 181; 2009 [1924]: §19, β, p. 160).

¹⁹ Heidegger (2009 [1924]: §5a), p. 14).

²⁰ Ibid., §6, p. 16.

'Vocal announcing', Heidegger says, is a means by which both humans and animals 'indicate' what 'pleases' and what 'distresses'. While, as Campbell points out, *logos* does not simply reduce to the making of vocalisations in this context, vocalisations provide Heidegger with the 'necessary background for investigating *λόγος* because sound is a dimension of *λόγος* that reveals the original and essential togetherness of humans'.²¹ We see the ascription of *Mitsein* and 'indication' to animals here, an ascription that, as Storey notes, is not repeated from *Being and Time* onwards.²²

Soon after, in *FCM*, Heidegger breaks with the exclusively ontological preoccupations of both the Aristotle lectures and *Being and Time*, and heads into the far more empirical territory of biology, zoology, and ethology, with multiple reflections on the behaviour of lizards, bees, woodpeckers, and microorganisms, and references to recent experiments by Wilhelm Roux, Hans Driesch, Jakob von Uexküll, and others. Heidegger's three theses on the human, the animal, and the stone are presented alongside a fleet of observations and examples from these biologists. This concern for ontic science is striking, and, as McNeill and Walker note in their Translators' Introduction, not repeated elsewhere in Heidegger's corpus. *FCM* treats 'world', by which Heidegger means the 'accessibility of beings', as the fundamental metaphysical concept implicit within our contemporary way of distinguishing between the human and life. World is presented as the ultimate ontological battleground concealed within the traditional dualisms, definitions, and modes of categorisation that institute a separation between the human and the animal. One of Heidegger's chief aims in the lecture course is to show that, if we deconstruct the 'rational animal model', and disassemble Cartesian anthropology, we can observe that the human's distinctive features—language, sociality, being-towards-death—are best understood as features of a being that 'has' world, a being for whom world is 'accessible'. The characteristic traits of the animal—captivation by environmental stimuli, acute senses, a limited field of action—are features of a being that has a restricted or 'poor' world, a being that cannot access world in the way that the human accesses world.

In the wake of *FCM*, the references to the animal in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* become sparser and more unyielding. Claims in which he explicitly denies what he now sees as constitutively human traits to the animal—including worldhood, language, and death—are dispersed across

²¹ Campbell (2012: 251).

²² Storey (2015: 88).

his works. In *Being and Truth*, a lecture course delivered in 1933–4 during Heidegger’s tenure as rector of the University of Freiburg, he claims the following:

The animal does not speak because it cannot speak. And it cannot because it does not need to speak. It does not need to speak because it does not have to. It does not have to because it does not find itself in *the urgent need to speak*. It does not stand in such a need because it is not *compelled by need*. It is not compelled because it is *closed off to the assailing powers*. Which powers? The *superior power of Being!*²³

These claims are not richly empirically adorned like those of *FCM*. Heidegger presents them without any corresponding ‘data’ from the world of theoretical biology. In this passage he seems far more intransigent regarding the ontological status of animal than the early discussion of ‘animateness’, indication, and vocal announcing analysed in his 1924 Aristotle lectures, where we see far less of an attempt to secure an ontological hierarchy. Elsewhere in the text Heidegger restates the findings of his comparative analysis in *FCM* in emphatic terms, indicating that, though he invokes the concept of the human’s domination more explicitly here, the essence of his approach to animality has not changed:

The *animal* is confined within itself and at the same time benumbed. The essence of the organism is precisely to be connected to an environment, but to be benumbed in this connectedness.

With *man*, this connection to the environment is *cleared*. Man understands the environment *as* environment; he is thereby able to *master* it and *form* it.²⁴

Shortly after, in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), Heidegger couches things in even more extreme vocabulary, baldly asserting that, unlike the human, the animal ‘has no world [*Welt*], nor any environment [*Umwelt*]’.²⁵ And yet, around the same time he claims in *On the Origin of the Work of Art* that, though ‘plants and animals have no world’, they do belong to ‘the hidden throng of an environment into which they have been put’.²⁶ The ontological and ontical gifts that Heidegger is willing to bestow on the

²³ Heidegger (2001 [1933–4]: §5a), p. 80.

²⁵ Heidegger (2000 [1935]: 49–50).

²⁴ Ibid., §22c), p. 137.

²⁶ Heidegger (2002 [1935–6]: 23).

animal remain ambiguous, they are granted in some places and taken away in others, but it is clear that the concept of the singularity of the human is always preserved.

Almost a decade later, in his lectures on Parmenides, we see further evidence of this effort to retain the idea of an ontological specialness that cannot be captured and articulated by anthropological approaches (whether 'philosophical' or 'scientific–biological'):

Man himself acts [*handelt*] through the hand [*Hand*]; for the hand is, together with the word, the essential distinction of man. Only a being which, like man, 'has' the word [...] can and must 'have' 'the hand'. Through the hand occur both prayer and murder, greeting and thanks, oath and signal, and also the 'work' of the hand, the 'hand-work', and the tool. The handshake seals the covenant. The hand brings about the 'work' of destruction. The hand exists as hand only where there is disclosure and concealment. No animal has a hand, and a hand never originates from a paw or a claw or a talon. Even the hand of one in desperation (it least of all) is never a talon, with which a person clutches wildly.²⁷

Heidegger is explicit here about the distinction between the prehensile animal organ and the hand understood as part of the operation of *begreifen*, conceptualising, the process via which the human gains a grip on the world. His claims appear to be indifferent to findings within the emerging discipline of primate research—for example, Köhler's investigation into the problem-solving abilities of anthropoid apes. For Heidegger, even an ape that stacks crates on top of one another in order to attain food that is out of reach does not use have 'hands' in the way that the human has hands. Its instinctual capacity to solve a problem is not of the order of human understanding.

Letter on Humanism (1946), an essay in which Heidegger responds to twentieth-century approaches to subjectivity embodied in existentialism, contains similarly forceful claims concerning the human's separateness and superiority over animality. Heidegger claims in the text that the traditional determination of the human as a rational animal, which forms the basis of humanism, does not think the human's *humanitas* 'high enough'.²⁸ And yet, prior to this statement, he claims that the human–animal relation is

²⁷ Heidegger (1982 [1942]: §5c), p. 80.

²⁸ Heidegger (1977 [1946]: 233–4).

‘scarcely conceivable’ and does not lend itself to rankings and classifications of any kind.²⁹ What look like definitive statements concerning the human/animal distinction are therefore never entirely unambiguous. Heidegger dramatically suggests in his 1938 lecture course on Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation* that the question of the human’s relation to the animal is not an ‘academic’ question at all, and so cannot produce a concise answer.³⁰ It is not a matter of having knowledge of a certain field, and increasing this knowledge until one has attained the answer, rendering Köhler’s ape experiments entirely irrelevant. For Heidegger, it is impossible for an ‘answer’ to come through those empirical channels:

Supposing a chasm separates animal and human being, the question whether a universal biology or ‘anthropology’ determines the essence of the human being ‘correctly’ or ‘incorrectly’ becomes meaningless, because they are unable to determine it at all.³¹

Heidegger appears to be suggesting here that the ‘abyss’ is one that opens up within our knowledge. It is one that opens up in our own thinking; it marks the limitation of our capacity to comprehend the idea of continuity between ourselves and other species. We encounter the abyss at the boundaries of scientific thought, and it cannot be bridged by the empirical sciences because they are always already unable to take up the task of formulating the question of the human’s relationship to the rest of life. Anthropology and biology, like all currents of Western thought, already have an answer to the question of the human–animal relation in mind prior to their investigations. For two millennia, Heidegger says,

European human being has [...] determined itself as an animal, which is to say: has posited the realm of animality as the fundamental measure of any essential delimitation of being human [...] animality is posited as the generic realm within which the essence of the human being is specified.³²

We have inherited and become ‘fixated’ (*festellen*) by our own conception of ourselves as rational animals, and this conception of the human being as ‘psychosomatic’ has ‘long been taken *for granted*'.³³ The notion that our organic form is the brute material basis of the ‘higher’ orientations of logic,

²⁹ Ibid. 230

³² Ibid. 20.

³⁰ Heidegger (2016 [1938–9]: §9, p. 19).

³³ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. 22.

reason, language, and so on is so sedimented that only philosophy, the discipline that eludes and precedes the boundaries and schemas of other disciplines, is capable of putting it in question. But even as a philosophical question, the issue of the human's kinship to the animal appears intractable.³⁴ It is this idea of intractability, of theoretical 'inconceivability' more than anything else, that seems to inform Heidegger's conception of an abyss between the human and the animal.

There is no doubt that Heidegger is presenting a stratification of some kind throughout his corpus, one that, if anything, becomes more rigid as his thinking develops. But what kind of stratification is it? *Prima facie* it would seem that the human's distinctive participation in Being establishes a fundamentally advantageous position within nature. But I wish to argue that a closer examination of the relatively few passages in which Heidegger deals with the animal at great length presents a more enigmatic scene. There is a sense in which the animal, with its mysterious absence of a rich worldhood, has advantages of its own. The human speaks, questions, and dies. But the arguments in which Heidegger produces this conception of the human also describe it as prone to a 'turbulence' and 'terror' that the benumbed animal forgoes.³⁵ There is, therefore, something more mysterious going on: Heidegger deprives the animal of human attributes, but in the same breath he also deprives the human of animal attributes. A close reading of *FCM* reveals how this complex tension between the human and the animal arises.

The Philosophical Project of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*

The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, more than any other text, can assist us in navigating this perplexity. The comparative examination that the lectures present provides the clearest possible compass points for Heidegger's thinking on animals, and the fact that its ancestry can be seen in his early works, and its progeny in his later works, also provides a window onto these other phases of his thought. Rather than attempting to do justice to every instance where the idea of animality crops up in Heidegger's thought in a single publication, I will therefore have *FCM* as my key focus,

³⁴ Heidegger (1977 [1946]: 230).

³⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §7, p. 21; §6b), β), p. 19); see also Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §§30, 39, 40).

and in some cases I will use the lecture course as an optic for looking ahead and looking back. Though Heidegger appears to insist on a separation between the human and the animal throughout his life, the later texts, which contain the most 'hard-line' version of this separation, also contain far less justificatory work. His interest in the animal appears to wane, and it is only really used as a contrast case with human beings. It is in *FCM* that the animal is more than just an intriguing point of contrast, so by examining *FCM* closely it will be possible to gain a deeper and wider understanding of Heidegger's views on this topic, and to illuminate contexts and areas of analysis that have thus far gone unnoticed.

The core focus of *FCM*'s comparative analysis is not principally to produce statements about the ontology of animal life, but to shed light on the meaning of 'world' as a fundamental concept of metaphysics. This is one of the most important contextual points when it comes to interpreting his three theses. Heidegger explored the phenomenon of world in *Being and Time*, in terms of the way in which we are in the world in an everyday sense, 'proximally and for the most part'. In *On the Essence of Ground*, he examined world by questioning the history of the word 'world'. In *FCM*, Heidegger says he will embark upon a new approach: he will examine the extent to which different kinds of being may be said to 'have' world.³⁶ This 'having', for Heidegger, signifies a capacity to 'access' beings as what they are, to access beings 'as such' and 'as a whole', rather than apprehend only a particular segment of them.³⁷ It seems uncontroversial to claim that the human being 'has' world in this sense: it is able to access entities and respond to them in countless ways. But what about animals or non-living, inert entities? Heidegger claims that, by teasing out the implications of the theses, and thereby establishing the degree to which the human and other kinds of being have world, the phenomenon of world as such can be clarified.³⁸

Heidegger's comparative examination of world in *FCM* is staged within an investigation into the 'contemporary situation', the particular juncture in the history of metaphysics that we have arrived at.³⁹ Heidegger prefaces his discussion of animality with the claim that aspects of our contemporary epoch, our contemporary way of doing philosophy, have estranged us from the more primordial knowledge embodied in Greek thought, which preceded the present-day dualisms, schemas, categories, and preoccupations with subjectivity that now dominate, and which the comparative

³⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §42, p. 176).

³⁷ Ibid., §68, p. 284.

³⁸ Ibid., §42, pp. 177–8.

³⁹ Ibid., §18, p. 69.

examination of the human, the animal, and the stone aims to encapsulate. 'The enrootedness of philosophising', he says near the start of the lectures, has now 'been lost'.⁴⁰ Contemporary philosophising focuses on producing knowledge that can be 'made into a useful result, something for everyone to learn and repeat'.⁴¹ The fundamental concepts of world, finitude, and solitude have been covered over, and his aim in the lectures is to show us how to unearth them from within our contemporary situation.

Though this phase of Heidegger's thought comes prior to his later thematisation of the onto-destinal diminishment of philosophical thinking through techno-science, his concern in the lectures with the historical degeneration of philosophy, the 'fate' of philosophical questions as being 'rootless', 'heaped together in subjects according to viewpoints that can be taught and learned', anticipates his later critique of calculative thinking, and frames his analyses in *FCM* of the instrumental metaphysics implicit in our understanding of the human–animal relation. Heidegger indicates that we were not always in the grip of the journalistic, goal-oriented thinking of the contemporary age, with its pervasive emphasis on correctness and concision over depth and curiosity. To recover a more profound mode of thinking, he insists that we go back to the ancients, and begin to recognise and comprehend the various stages at which the original understanding of 'genuine' philosophising was disestablished.⁴²

Heidegger's contention is that our contemporary metaphysical 'attunement' presupposes the positions presented in the comparative examination. If we lay these positions out in the form of three 'guiding theses', we will get a clearer perspective on the metaphysical principles that we have come to appropriate unquestioningly. The point of such a project is, in the final analysis, essentially to reveal the fundamental concepts of metaphysics and the way in which they have been concealed throughout the history of philosophy. Heidegger claims that we now have a 'rich stockpile of philosophy', a 'great marketplace' of ideas, but this marketplace is really the outcome of a process in which philosophy has dispersed into multiple 'divergent elements' that we must now try to 'stitch together'.⁴³ In the text's opening passages Heidegger suggests that, given that philosophy has now become the 'victim of ambiguity', we need to rediscover the more primordial Greek mode of thinking if we are to withstand and comprehend

⁴⁰ Ibid., §10, p. 35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., §1a), p. 2; §10, p. 35.

the vertiginous threat of a nihilism lurking at the edges of contemporary philosophising.⁴⁴

If philosophy is the victim of ambiguity, all of our philosophical assertions will be ambiguous unless we can understand the origin of this ambiguity and address it directly. Instead of trying to establish a ‘concrete characterisation’ that will serve ‘for all time’, we should begin with propositions that are exploratory, aimed at opening up a question or a problem further rather than trying to solve it.⁴⁵ If we are to avoid simply adding to the philosophical ‘stockpile’, and producing more conceptual commodities for the marketplace of ideas, these exploratory propositions must be made in full light of whatever metaphysical prejudices and biases grip the age, so we need to discern what these might be first. We must come to understand the ‘fundamental attunement’ of contemporary metaphysics, genealogically to trace the metaphysical juncture we have arrived at, in order to find our way back to a more essential perspective. We can then approach the theses in the comparative examination—which represent a fundamental, antiquated method of classifying human existence in contradistinction to other beings—with more discernment, and perhaps retrieve something philosophically valuable from them.

The majority of what follows will be dedicated to unravelling and clarifying the concepts, metaphysical schemas, and mass of biological principles that Heidegger presents in *FCM* in relation to the question of animality. Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the standard interpretation of Heidegger’s account of animality in order to give the reader a sense of the deep disquiet and even disgust that it inspires amongst Heidegger commentators. Chapter 2 will then present an exegesis of the neglected opening passages of the lecture course in which Heidegger clarifies the aims of his project. Chapters 3 and 4 will proceed chronologically through the lectures and examine Heidegger’s analysis in Part One of *FCM* of the ‘fundamental attunement’ of ‘profound boredom’, which he regards as the contemporary optic through which all metaphysics occurs, including that of the human/animal distinction. In Chapter 5, I will turn to Heidegger’s examination of life by analysing his appraisal of early twentieth-century biology. Chapter 6 will launch my own critical dialogue with *FCM*, focusing on Heidegger’s use of the concept of ‘spirit’. As spirit is one half of the crucially important life/spirit divide, one would assume that Heidegger would pay as much attention to spirit as he does to life, and, in this vein, analyse anthropology as

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., §61a), p. 260.

thoroughly as he does biology. However, Heidegger restricts his comments concerning anthropology to the few cursory remarks in Part One, in which he denounces the discipline as perhaps a dangerous form of *Darstellung*.⁴⁶ In these remarks Heidegger ignores the body of work, spearheaded by Max Scheler during the 1920s, known as 'philosophical anthropology'. I will argue that, despite the fact that Heidegger critiques what he sees as deep delusions implicit in anthropology, this German tradition contains insights that resonate with his own project in *FCM*.

Having put philosophical anthropology onto the metaphysical map that Heidegger draws up in *FCM*, I will then return in Chapter 7 to Heidegger's own perspective, revealing how he attempts to get us back on the track of our philosophical journey by retrieving a genuinely philosophical attitude from our contemporary situation. My conclusion will attempt to interweave the metaphysical observations of *FCM* with the anthropo-biological insights that Heidegger rejects in order to establish a new approach to the question of the human/animal distinction and the animality in us.

⁴⁶ Ibid., §18c), p. 77.

1

The Human versus the Animal

A Close Look at Heidegger's 'Comparative Examination'

Introducing the Hierarchising Charge

The metaphysical division between human and animal life that Heidegger advances in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (*FCM*), remains, as we have just seen, more or less consistent throughout his philosophical career. Heidegger's comparative examination summarises the distinct manner in which the stone, the animal, and the human 'have' world. By this, Heidegger means the degree to which these entities have 'access' to beings.¹ According to the first thesis, the stone, though it is part of the world, has no possibility of accessing beings, of 'standing over against' world and taking an attitude towards it.² The stone can be put to various different uses, but it does not have any independent, autonomous capacities for action in and of itself. In contrast, the animal *does* have limited access to beings, a restricted field of action.³ In his elaboration of the second thesis—that the animal is 'poor in world'—Heidegger claims that the life of the animal is always bound to a specific habitat.⁴ It lives within an 'encircling ring' (*Umring*), which determines the terrain in which the various possibilities of instinctual behaviour belonging to the animal are opened up.⁵ Within it, the animal experiences its habitat as being open for it, as a space within which it is driven to act in accordance with its capacities.

Though it is able to enjoy a degree of plasticity in its actions, the animal does not 'have' world in the sense that the human has world. As a world-poor being, the animal has a merely reflexive, immediate response to stimuli that it is able to detect. The encircling rings of different species differ in breadth; more complex organisms will have a wider field of action than basic organisms. However, the animal organism, *qua* animal organism, whether it

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §46, p. 193). ² Ibid., §67, p. 282.

³ Ibid., §42, p. 177. ⁴ Ibid., §61b), p. 257.

⁵ Ibid.

is a protozoon or a primate, will be unable to step outside of its encircling ring: 'Throughout the course of its life the animal is confined to its environmental world, immured [...] within a fixed sphere that is incapable of further expansion or contraction.'⁶ In the final thesis, Heidegger claims that the human, in contrast to both the stone and the animal, is capable of 'forming' world.⁷ Though it is an embodied being, and therefore subject to various organismic constraints, the human is not bound to an encircling ring, and is therefore capable of a greater degree of plasticity than other entities. In Heidegger's terminology, the human can access entities 'as such' and 'as a whole'.

A diverse range of critics have noted that these theses look like Heidegger's own version of a classical valorisation of life, an ordering of beings that places the human at the top. In some cases the theses have inspired outrage along these lines, prompting David Farrell Krell, perhaps the most vehement of *FCM*'s critics, to describe the lecture course as a 'colossal failure'.⁸ After warning us, in *Being and Time*, against establishing neat Cartesian boundaries between different aspects of human existence—life, spirit, and mind—Heidegger now appears to be sectioning the human off from life entirely.⁹ Krell argues that *FCM* amounts to a failed attempt at conventional ontotheological hierarchising. His assessment of Heidegger's lecture course is saturated with an air of melancholy at what he sees as the downfall of a philosophical luminary. '[N]owhere', Krell says, 'is Heidegger's thought so uninspired and so reactionary as it is here'.¹⁰ Heidegger is devising an outmoded theoretical biology, one that 'enucleates the cow and mutilates the ape with all-too-human pieties'.¹¹ Heidegger's endeavour, Krell says, is to '[dig] a ditch to separate man from animality'.¹² For Krell, *FCM* rides roughshod over Heidegger's heretofore subtle attempts to maintain a nuanced, critical relationship to the prejudices embedded in the history of Western metaphysics. The lecture course is an aberration that tarnishes his *Gesamtausgabe*.

Krell's critical approach to the lecture course is largely inspired by Derrida. However, it diverts from Derrida's—whose critique is perhaps even more devastating—in an important respect. For Krell, the worrying content of the comparative examination represents a disruptive moment in Heidegger's thinking, and derives its enigma from this disruptiveness and

⁶ Ibid., §48, p. 198.

⁷ Ibid., §68, p. 285.

⁸ Krell (1992: 315, 128).

⁹ Heidegger (2001 [1933–4]: §6, p. 44).

¹⁰ Krell (1992: 315).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

discontinuity with other works. Krell cannot fathom why Heidegger would ‘collapse back into the congealed categories [...] of ontotheology’ that he himself identifies in other places.¹³ However, for Derrida, the humanistic and evaluative prejudices contained in *FCM* are entirely in keeping with Heidegger’s thought on animals as a whole, and therefore all the more powerful and concerning. For Derrida, Heidegger’s approach to the issue of animality across his works is ‘controlled’ by an ‘axiomatic, explicit or not’.¹⁴ The tone of Heidegger’s articulation of this axiomatic throughout the *Gesamtausgabe* is dogmatically brusque, ‘peremptory and authoritarian’ as Derrida puts it, on account of the fact that it attempts either to conceal or to redecorate prejudices that nonetheless continue to erupt in his work.¹⁵ Heidegger’s *Parmenides* lectures, in which he denies the ‘disclosing and concealing’ hand to the animal, are exemplary of Heidegger’s privative approach to animality for Derrida.¹⁶ Derrida concedes that Heidegger’s formulation of the three theses in *FCM* is unusual, something that ‘he practically never does elsewhere’, but the biases that the theses contain are far from unusual.¹⁷ For Derrida, the content of *FCM* simply underscores Heidegger’s general refusal to grant the animal what he sees as the profoundest human endowments: hands, *techne*, language, world, spirit, and death.¹⁸

Derrida picks up on references throughout Heidegger’s works to point out the unwavering attitude to human separateness continually driving Heidegger’s deductions from the animal. He notes that in *On the Way to Language*, a collection of writings from the 1950s, Heidegger makes the claim that, because animals ‘cannot have experience [*erfahren*] of “death as death”’, they ‘cannot speak’.¹⁹ For Derrida, such bold statements receive insufficient justification. Heidegger’s refusal to recognise animal death in particular, and his simultaneous insistence on human death as ontologically rarefied and other, is internally confused according to Derrida:

What could this mean? What is being-for-death? What is death for a *Dasein* that is never defined *essentially* as a living thing? This is not a matter of opposing life to death, but of wondering what semantic content can be given to death in a discourse for which the relation to death, the experience of death, remains unrelated to the life of the living thing.²⁰

¹³ Ibid. 105.

¹⁸ Ibid. 57.

¹⁴ Derrida (1989: 11).

¹⁹ Ibid. 120.

¹⁵ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. 12.

If Dasein is not to be understood as a living being, the definitive emphasis on the significance of Dasein's death, when death is undeniably a biotic process, seems strange. Derrida notes that *FCM*'s theses distinguish the stone from the animal on the basis that the stone 'cannot die'.²¹ And yet, in later works, Heidegger denies this possibility of dying, rather than merely 'perishing', to the animal.²² For Derrida, Heidegger glides over this strangeness in his continual insistence upon the notion that death is an ontological delineator.

Derrida also raises questions about the ambivalent nature of the animal's world-relation in Heidegger's comparative analysis. Having granted the animal some form of worldhood, albeit an obscurely ambiguous '*not-having*' of world 'in *being-able-to-have*' it, Heidegger soon puts things in an even more 'brutal' formula in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which he bluntly insists that the animal 'has no world'.²³ Despite Heidegger's efforts to avoid anthropocentrism by rejecting the rhetoric of a scale of increasingly complex beings culminating in the human being, Derrida insists that his analysis ultimately '[reintroduces] the measure of man by the very route it claimed to be withdrawing from that measure'—that is, by invoking the idea of 'lack or privation'.²⁴ Heidegger's failure to escape anthropocentrism only becomes more worrying in later works, so in a sense Derrida takes *FCM* to be a deeper, more nuanced articulation of the biases that punctuate Heidegger's thought in general. The lectures reflect 'the profoundest metaphysical humanism: and I do mean the profoundest'.²⁵ Heidegger's humanism is deep and provocative, but not liberated from the metaphysics that he ultimately wishes to reject.

For both Derrida and Krell, the most problematic issue arising in *FCM*'s animal chapters is one that is first and foremost internal to Heidegger's thought. For Krell, it seems impossible to reconcile the metaphysical 'statements of essence' contained in these sections of the lecture course with what he takes to be the more subtle work done in other texts, in which Heidegger denounces humanistic bias. Derrida sees no such aberration or mystery here. For him Heidegger's three theses simply call to mind a whole tapestry of humanistic orientations that spread throughout Heidegger's work and prompt us to question the legitimacy of all of the concepts interwoven in Heidegger's handling of animality in general. Beyond this 'intra-Heideggerian' debate about whether or not the theses are representative of Heidegger's thinking on animals as a whole, some commentators take issue

²¹ Derrida (2008: 154).

²² Ibid.

²³ Derrida (1989: 49, 50).

²⁴ Ibid. 49.

²⁵ Ibid. 12.

with *FCM* on the basis that Heidegger's comparative examination presents a way of contrasting human and animal life that is simply incorrect and irreconcilable with the developments of contemporary evolutionary biology. Jonas critiques the manner in which Heidegger remains determinedly 'oblivious' to zoological data, especially regarding the possession of 'the rudiments of language', that tie together animal and human behaviour.²⁶ Storey argues that 'Heidegger's failure to integrate [...] evolution into his thought is the greatest gap in his philosophy of nature'.²⁷ It appears bluntly anti-evolutionist to deny, for example, the significance of the often complex systems of communication possessed by non-human species, which are tools to their survival and keys to their flourishing.

The claim that the process of animal death is entirely other than human dying also seems irreconcilable with scientifically informed thinking. The course of human evolution, like that of any other organism, is part of a cycle of flourishing and decay. There is no scientific basis for granting human mortality an entirely separate category, emphasising once again, for Derrida, that the 'contribution of zoological science' makes little impression on Heidegger, who remains 'fundamentally *uninterested* in what it has to say'.²⁸ And yet, in spite of the disconnect between the comparative examination and the observations of the contemporary life sciences, Heidegger presents the results of recent biological research alongside his enigmatic thesis, as if biology could somehow justify this thesis. But it is clear that his hypothesis that the animal is 'poor in world' whereas the human is 'world-forming' is likely to go against the biology of his day, which, coming in the wake of Darwin, surely disabuses the human of all claims to uniqueness.

It is unclear how Heidegger can use contemporary biology positively if his analysis appears to want to undermine one its most significant findings—that is, the notion that the human is descended from an ape. Heidegger's tone concerning our primate ancestry is at best highly sceptical:

When we ask this question concerning the relation between man and animal, we cannot therefore be concerned with deciding whether or not man is descended from an ape. For we cannot begin to pose this question,

²⁶ Cited in Aho (2009: 78). ²⁷ Storey (2015: 95).

²⁸ Cited in Christopher Johnson, 'Derrida and Technology', in Glendinning and Eaglestone (2008: 60).

let alone answer it, until we clearly appreciate what the distinction between them is and how this distinction should be drawn.²⁹

By suggesting that it is premature even to pose the question of human-ape kinship, Heidegger rejects or ignores altogether the fact that evolutionary biology has already made significant progress in answering this question. Storey argues that 'Heidegger's claim that animality, life and the earth are radically other regions of being indicates that these orders are not intelligible, that is, they admit of no degree of continuity or analogical relation with the human being'.³⁰ It is 'more than a little strange', Storey notes,

that a philosopher so intent on questioning the foundations of Western thought refused to grapple with what Daniel Dennett has with good reason called a most 'dangerous idea', the idea that called into question the scientific, philosophical, and religious foundations of the West: evolution by natural selection.³¹

This commits Heidegger to the view that nature 'cannot be conceived as a "cosmos" in the original sense of an ordered state of affairs'.³² The theses appear to undermine the very idea of continuity and coherence, and therefore the systematic order of all biological taxonomies. It therefore seems unlikely that Heidegger will be able to exploit biology for the purpose of furnishing his own metaphysical agenda in *FCM*.

I now wish to break down the issues that arise in the secondary literature further in order to provide a more detailed picture of the following specific areas that concern commentators the most: the lack of content on the human organism in *FCM*, the denial, in the lecture course, of animal language, *Mitsein*, selfhood, death, and temporality, and the lack of attention paid by Heidegger to the issue of internal differentiation within the animal kingdom.

(i) The Organism

It seems that there is little talk in *FCM* of the human's relationship to its own drives, given that the human, like the animal, is surely a living being

²⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §43, p. 179).

³² Ibid. 98.

³⁰ Storey (2015: 98).

³¹ Ibid. 93.

containing organs that are activated by certain capacities. Instead of providing any such discussion, Heidegger draws a distinction between animal behaviour (*Benehmen*), an enslaved, captivated (*benommen*) receptivity to drives, and human comportment (*Verhalten*), a reflective attendance and ability either to 'let be' or not to let be that which is encountered.³³ *FCM* thus appears to be a re-enactment of Heidegger's general refusal to incorporate a discussion of human embodiment into his characterisation of *Dasein*, despite the fact that, as Cerbone says, we might hope that *FCM*'s lengthy analysis of organs and the organism would remedy the absence of the body *Being and Time*.³⁴ For Cerbone, the matter of *Dasein*'s bodily nature is not illuminated in Heidegger's exploration of the essence of organic capacity; rather it remains concealed within the general problematic of world.³⁵ This implies that, despite the richness of contemporary biology's understanding of organic function, which Heidegger refers to throughout the second half of the lecture course, the question of the human organism remains a steadfastly non-biological question. This sectioning of the human body off from the purview of biology is itself a confusing decision for commentators. Heidegger seems to be using this mysterious immunity of the human body to the structures of biological thought to justify the forging of an abyssal distinction between the human and the animal. By 'digging' this division, as Krell puts it, Heidegger uncritically adopts orthodox ontotheological categories and 'oblivious decisions'.³⁶ Heidegger's abyss ensnares the animal within an impoverished encircling environment from which it can never depart, all the while granting the human the lofty task of 'forming' world.

This apparent ordering of beings is not immediately objectionable to all commentators. Calarco argues that, *prima facie*, Heidegger's aim of establishing the 'animality of the animal' on its own terms looks like a genuine attempt to avoid anthropocentrism. He describes Heidegger's method of bracketing common-sense definitions of animality, as well as those associated with human psychology, as 'provocative' and 'progressive'.³⁷ However, despite its initial promise, Calarco concludes that Heidegger's lecture course soon falls back into 'one of the most classical and dogmatic of philosophical prejudices', eventually succumbing to the traditional hierarchy of the *scala naturae*.³⁸

³³ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §64, p. 274).

³⁵ Ibid. 225.

³⁶ Krell (1992: 105).

³⁴ Cerbone (2000: 212).

³⁷ Calarco (2008: 22).

³⁸ Ibid. 23.

The most obvious problem with this traditional view is its empirical unjustifiability. MacIntyre argues that the idea of the encircling ring of the animal is dubious from the start. Heidegger ignores the obviously complex ways in which various species, including primates, dogs, and dolphins, structure their environment. These species, MacIntyre says,

do not merely respond to features of their environment, they actively explore it; they devote perceptual attention to the objects that they encounter, they inspect them from different angles, they recognise the familiar, they identify and classify, they may on occasion treat one and the same object first as something to be played with and then as something to be eaten, and some of them recognise and even grieve for what is absent.³⁹

These various capacities portray a set of 'belief-presupposing and belief-guided intentions' that are acted upon often in collaboration with other animals.⁴⁰ The idea that each creature has its own strictly limited environmental niche within which it responds only to a specific series of stimuli, and beyond which entities are meaningless for it, amounts, according to MacIntyre, to a grossly oversimplified depiction of animal life, one that is incompatible with the claims of biology. Not only do different creatures structure, augment, and change their environments at will; they use their sense organs, MacIntyre says, for different effects and to different degrees.⁴¹ The character of an animal's sensory capacities cannot possibly be summarised in a statement as basic as Heidegger's claim that 'the animal is poor in world'.⁴²

(ii) Language

Heidegger associates the animal's attenuated access to world with its complete absence of language, which he reserves exclusively for the world-forming human. Having stated repeatedly that the core of the phenomenon of world-formation is the human's ability to grasp entities 'as such' and 'as a

³⁹ MacIntyre (1999: 46).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² MacIntyre claims that, 'while these sensory differences may make it difficult on occasion to *imagine* how some animals apprehend what they apprehend, the limitations of imagination should not be allowed to obscure the extent to which and the ways in which the perceptual and intentional achievements of such animals are obscured and misconstrued from Heidegger's perspective' (*ibid.*).

whole', Heidegger questions more closely how we should consider the structure of this 'as'. He begins by claiming that a merely linguistic interpretation of different parts of speech will not suffice, since 'this "as" is no mere whim of our language, but is clearly somehow grounded in the meaning of Dasein itself'.⁴³ Language is to be understood as the capacity to disclose something 'as' what it is. Heidegger explores this 'as' in *FCM*, not as a linguistic tool, but as something that Dasein is always already familiar with prior to its linguistic utterances.⁴⁴ It is correct, Heidegger says, to claim that the human navigates its world by making propositional statements about things, statements that may be deemed either 'true' or 'false' depending on whether or not they correctly inform us about some entity or state of affairs.⁴⁵ However, this way of approaching language takes us only so far when it comes to understanding the 'as'. Heidegger claims that, first and foremost, the statement's capacity to deliver information—that is, to disclose the way in which something 'is'—is due to the fact that it 'contains a *manifestness of the matter itself*'.⁴⁶ The structure of the statement that 'makes manifest' the entities about which it is uttered therefore 'bears' the 'as' 'within itself'.⁴⁷ The human, according to this view, possesses the possibility of disclosing the way in which entities are manifested 'as such' and 'as a whole'. This possibility arises as a result of its participation in *logos*. We should, however, be wary, Heidegger says, of the definition of *logos* as 'everything that is spoken and sayable'.⁴⁸ This definition obscures the essential meaning of *logos*, which denotes more than 'our vocabulary taken as a whole'.⁴⁹ Heidegger wishes to define *logos* as 'the fundamental faculty of being able to talk discursively, and accordingly, to speak'.⁵⁰ On this basis the Greeks characterised the human as *zōon logon echon*, 'that living being that essentially possesses the possibility of discourse', as distinct from the animal, which lacks any possibility of discourse.⁵¹

For Heidegger, something crucial in our understanding of the essence of the human was lost with the translation of *zōon logon echon* into the Latin *animal rationale*. The latter term depicts the human as an animal plus some extra-natural property, an idea that Heidegger strongly resists. Moreover, the move from *logos* to *ratio* leads to a somewhat impoverished understanding of language, one that forms the basis of the 'traditional' method of assessing the truth value of assertions. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger

⁴³ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §69a), p. 287.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 288.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., §72a), p. 305.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

attempts to locate the origin of this traditional conception of truth as 'correspondence' in a more 'primordial' conception of truth.⁵² He claims that the Latinisation of *logos* entailed the forgetting of the original meaning of the assertion, according to which the assertion's 'being true' does not simply refer to its correspondence with something in the world, as if truth were contained in the bare utterance itself, and did not incorporate an edifice of concepts and suppositions. Rather, when it is said of an assertion that it is true, this refers to the fact that the assertion functions as an exercise of uncovering—that is, it discloses the way in which an entity is. Rather than defining the entity in terms of 'what' it is, the uncovering of the assertion reveals entities '*in the "how" of their uncoveredness*'.⁵³ *Logos*, Heidegger claims, is a mode of 'letting something be seen', and, as such, it 'tells how entities comport themselves'.⁵⁴ In other words, the entity is '*discovered*' in the true assertion.⁵⁵ It is only those beings that possess 'understanding' and 'speak' that are capable of being told through *logos* how entities comport themselves. Heidegger insists that for those entities that lack in understanding—that is, non-human entities—'what they do remains hidden', and they will thus 'forget it... that is, for them it sinks back into hiddenness'.⁵⁶

It is the *logos* understood in this way as an exercise of truth, a way of disclosing entities *as* what they are, that Heidegger denies, wholesale, to the animal. Animals produce utterances that 'indicate something', but these utterances are not 'words'.⁵⁷ They are 'merely *ψόφου*, noises. They are vocal utterances (*φωνή*) that lack something, namely, *meaning*. The animal does not mean or understand by its call'.⁵⁸ It is often claimed, Heidegger says, that, whereas the animal produces a vocal utterance, the human produces a vocal utterance 'with meaning attached to it'.⁵⁹ This assumption that noises are somehow supplemented with meaning in the case of human explains the relation between meaning and utterance in the wrong direction, inferring from utterances towards meaning. The situation, Heidegger argues, is 'quite the reverse':

From the very beginning our essence is such as to understand and form the possibility of understanding. It is because our essence is like this that

⁵² Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §44).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, §44b), p. 262.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Introduction IIB, p. 56, §44b), p. 263.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Introduction IIB, p. 57.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §44b), p. 262.

⁵⁷ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §72, p. 307).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

utterances that we also produce have a meaning. Meaning does not accrue to sounds, but the reverse: the sound is first forged from meanings that are forming and have already formed. The *λόγος* is indeed *φωνή*, yet not primarily and then something else genesis of a symbol besides, but rather the reverse: it is primarily something else and then also... *φωνή*.⁶⁰

For Aristotle this ‘something else’ is interpreted as *σύμβολον*, which refers, Heidegger says, to a ‘joint, seam, or hinge, in which one thing is not simply brought together with the other, but the two are held to one another, so that they fit one another. Whatever is held together, fits together so that the two parts prove to belong together, is *σύμβολον*.⁶¹ Heidegger claims that discourse is meaningful—that is, it ‘forms a sphere of *understandability*’ only when there is this ‘being held together’, where there is the ‘genesis of a symbol’.⁶² Animal utterances are noises rather than words, because they are not formed on the basis of this ‘holding together’ of ‘agreement’. Like Aristotle, Heidegger insists that the *logos* ought not to be treated as a physiological activity that occurs in the vocal tract, as if it were a biological process among other biological processes.⁶³ The capacity to produce words rather than noises is rooted in this concept of ‘agreement’. An account of the origin of language would need to examine the way in which the ability to form words emerges from out of this ‘essential agreement of human beings with one another, in accordance with which they are *open in their being with one another for the beings around them*, which they can then individually agree about—and this also means fail to agree about’.⁶⁴

The human’s relationship to the *logos* therefore facilitates its peculiar ‘being open for...’, which ‘has the character of *apprehending something as something*’, and the capacity to articulate it.⁶⁵ This is what is meant by Heidegger’s claim that the human comports itself *towards* beings, rather than being captivated *by* them. Haar argues that this denial of language to the animal is one of the most extreme aspects of Heidegger’s account of animality: ‘The absence of speech in animals is more radical than the absence of the world. It is not a question of an *impoverished* language but of an absolute privation of speech. On this point the break between humans and animals seems the most unbridgeable.⁶⁶ The non-negotiable tone of Heidegger’s denial of animal language in *FCM* is registered by many readers of the lectures, not only because it appears, as Aho points out, to [disregard]

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. 308.

⁶³ Ibid. 309.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 306.

⁶⁶ Haar (1993b: 29).

the possibility of the animal's primitive but meaningful social language embodied in forms of gestures, cries and expressions', but because it posits apophantic discourse as the cornerstone of our own human essence.⁶⁷

It appears that, despite his examination of contemporary biology, Heidegger does not take on board research that explicitly situates the human and the animal within the same biological continuum. For example, Heidegger does not mention the recent experiments of Wolfgang Köhler, which indicate a sophisticated system of communication among anthropoid primates.⁶⁸ The implication seems to be, according to Haar, that the comparative investigation will have little to say about how animals actually are, and will essentially only tell us about ourselves.⁶⁹ The purpose of the lectures, Haar suggests,

seems to be an exorcism, a de-mystification of the 'link' with nature. Heidegger wants to show the impossibility of an *original* and fundamental implication or entanglement of human Dasein in living beings, to destroy the idea of an *animal lineage*, to exclude the myth of natural perfection as emphasised from Rousseau to Bergson. Not only is instinct not superior to intelligence, but it is far inferior to the simple understanding of being.⁷⁰

By the end of his analysis of animality, it seems that, having outlined the need to pay heed to the fateful 'inner unity' between science and metaphysics, Heidegger essentially wishes to neglect concrete empirical evidence that directly undermines his metaphysical statements of essence.⁷¹

(iii) *Mitsein* and Selfhood

In order to be meaningful, discourse, Heidegger says, must involve a 'being held together'—that is, a shared symbolic awareness that enables the signification of utterances.⁷² This symbolic character of language takes place against the backdrop of a social world in which entities are disclosed in a mutually comprehensible way. By claiming that discourse is irreducibly social, Heidegger apparently wishes to deny the animal both language and a meaningful social world in the same move. Heidegger insists that human language is not comprised of animal noises with meaning added; one cannot

⁶⁷ Aho (2009: 78).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Köhler (1948 [1917]).

⁷¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §45b), p. 189.

⁶⁹ Haar (1993b: 29).

⁷² Ibid., §72a), p. 308.

describe the distinction between the human and the animal using separate components that are added or subtracted. However, it appears as if, when it comes to the question of language, Heidegger has deducted all meaning from animal utterances and simultaneously ignored any possibility of an animal *Mitsein*. In so doing he commits himself to the idea that the capacity to make meaningful utterances depends exclusively upon a social milieu that belongs only to *Dasein*. As Aho argues, according to Heidegger's account even infants who have not yet developed language are included in world-formation rather than world-poverty insofar as they are 'immediately immersed in a meaningful public background', a domain of interpersonal conventions that form the fabric of *Dasein*'s world.⁷³ The *logos*, Aho says, is to be understood 'as the medium that arises out of the shared acts and practices of a historical people, and it is a medium that human beings immediately grow into and one that colours all of their factual experiences'.⁷⁴ The disinhibiting ring of the animal encircles only its narrow range of stimuli and does not encircle a 'we'. Animals cannot be included in this realm of meaningful social engagements; they are neither 'with us' nor with one another. This, like the absolute preclusion of the possibility of animal language, seems incompatible with empirical observations of sociality and communication among animals.⁷⁵ Glendinning argues that the a priori rejection of the possibility of community in animal life is part of what makes Heidegger's theses so 'stubbornly unrevisable'.⁷⁶ After marking out *Mitsein* as one of the constituents of *Dasein* in his existential analytic, Heidegger cannot possibly take seriously the idea that animals may participate in a 'we' without 'recasting the existential analytic as a whole'.⁷⁷

The question of the world-relation of the prelinguistic infant indicates a further major objection to Heidegger's comparative examination. Aho argues that the infant is to be included, according to Heidegger's guidelines, in world-formation, because it is born into a public domain in which it begins to structure a world of meaning for itself. This process amounts to 'learning how to be a "self" [*Selbst*] and depends on a capacity for selfhood in the first instance.⁷⁸ Heidegger insists that comportment, as opposed to animal captivation, in which an attitude is taken towards beings—one that is capable of deciding whether or not to 'let be' the beings that are

⁷³ Aho (2009: 90).

⁷⁴ Ibid. 91.

⁷⁵ Although intersubjectivity research into non-human primates did not begin until the 1970s, by the time of Heidegger's lecture course Köhler's experiments had demonstrated complex cooperative capacities in chimpanzees (see Köhler 1948 [1917]).

⁷⁶ Glendinning (1998: 69).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Aho (2009: 91).

encountered—depends upon this selfhood: '[A]ll comportment is only possible in a certain restraint [*Verhaltenheit*] and comporting [*Verhaltung*], and a stance [*Haltung*] is only given where a being has the character of a self or, as we also say, of a person.⁷⁹ The animal is denied this capacity for selfhood: 'Nothing of this kind is to be found in animality or in life in general.'⁸⁰ For Krell, this rejection of the possibility of animal selfhood is one in which '[e]very classical philosopheme of anthropocentric metaphysics and morals [...] intervenes with a vengeance'.⁸¹ The analysis is particularly problematic, since it follows shortly after Heidegger's discussion of organic life, in which he ascribes to the organism the characteristics of self-production, self-regulation, and self-renewal, powers that differentiate the organism from the machine.⁸² Despite using this vocabulary of intentional self-driving, Heidegger insists that this description has nothing to do with the kind of selfhood that is to be reserved for *Dasein*. This is because each instinctual capacity of the organism is reflexive and non-decisional. The capacity

remains *proper to itself*—and does so *without* any so-called *self-consciousness* or any *reflection* at all, without any relating back to itself. That is why we say that on account of this essential being proper to itself the capacity is *properly peculiar*. We shall reserve the expression 'self' and selfhood to characterise the *specifically human peculiarity*, its particular way of being proper to itself.⁸³

In the case of the human, it is not just its biological capacities that are 'proper to' it; rather its 'self *as such*' is proper to it. The human always relates back to itself in a detached reflectiveness. However, Heidegger does not attempt to establish a gradual distinction between organisms, in which their degree of selfhood is commensurate with their organic complexity. Rather, he retains the idea of an enigmatic gulf between the human and the animal, where only the former can be described as having selfhood.

(iv) Death and Time

Not only is the animal deprived of high degrees of organic plasticity, language, sociality, and selfhood; it is also deprived of temporality and

⁷⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §64, p. 274).

⁸² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §53, p. 222).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., §56, p. 233.

⁸¹ Krell (1992: 121).

finitude. In other words, the animal is never subjected to the possibility of its own negation. Insofar as it is essentially captivated, the animal does not die 'in the sense in which dying [*sterben*] is ascribed to human beings', but rather 'comes to an end' (*verenden*).⁸⁴ The struggle for survival that all animal species undergo is, for Heidegger, nothing to do with the anticipation and avoidance of death, since the possibility of death does not 'show up' for the animal in its encircling ring. Such struggles are to be understood simply in terms of the disinhibition of certain organic drives. Schalow asks whether it is possible to reconcile this claim with what appears to be the case empirically:

[I]n observing animals, it is clear that they grasp death in some forms, or at least the nature of 'demise', as when a lioness whines when discovering its recently born offspring have been killed by another predator. Even if we accept Heidegger's claim that human beings have a closer affinity for the 'nothing' than do animals, can we clearly distinguish the line of demarcation between them?⁸⁵

One could push this query even further and ask whether we could plausibly claim that animals have a *more* immediate, more pervading, sense of death as an omnipresent possibility than human beings, insofar as there is never a hiatus in their attempt to avoid death. The animal, as Deleuze says in his *l'Abécédaire* interview, is 'always on the lookout', never at rest, always checking its surroundings and the possible threats or opportunities that they contain. Do the striving that one observes in animal behaviour to preserve life, and the immediate application of this striving, such as when a rodent freezes in the presence of a reptile or a chicken tries desperately to escape the clutches of a farmer about to ring its neck, potentially problematise the notion that the animal encounter with death is structurally, metaphysically distinct from the human encounter? Is there really such a straightforward division between perishing and dying?

Matters become more complex when we consider the fact that Heidegger himself admits that the animal's life is shaped, determined, and suspended by something other than it—that is, the environmental milieu that disinhibits its drives and thus compels it to act. Heidegger states that 'that which disinhibits, with all the various forms of disinhibition it entails, brings an

⁸⁴ Ibid., §61c), p. 267.

⁸⁵ Schalow (2006: 102–3).

essential disruption into the essence of the animal'.⁸⁶ That which is other to the animal dictates its behaviour, and this having of a relationship to an other brings the animal into a close ontological proximity to the human. Heidegger's response to this unintended kinship is to state that the claims he has made regarding the animal's world-relation are merely provisional and that animality is something yet to be clarified.⁸⁷ For Krell, this response is inadequate; Heidegger has closed the discussion of the second thesis by raising a problem that it is beyond the scope of his investigation to solve.⁸⁸

Heidegger's refusal of temporality to the animal is considered by commentators to be just as contentious as his refusal of animal *sterben*. This is due to Heidegger's description of the animal as a being that is comprised of finite organs that develop in accordance with a set of capacities that 'institute a span between birth and death'.⁸⁹ If this is the case, then the organism, as a living being, will have its own mode of temporality:

[O]rgans as established features [...] are bound to the lifespan of the animal, i.e., not merely in the first place to time as an objectively definable period during which the animal lives. Rather the organs are bound into and are bound up with the temporal span which the animal is capable of sustaining as a living being.⁹⁰

The poverty of the animal is related to its 'being bound' in this sense. Its organs are the 'articulation' of highly limited, temporally restricted capacities.⁹¹ And yet the human being, too, is a fleshly entity comprised of a system of organs. Why, Krell asks, does Heidegger present his discussion of the organism's relationship to time 'as though the human beings who shape their world were suddenly purged of organs and thus rescued from the constraints of time'?⁹² And why does Heidegger fail to acknowledge the fact that the impoverished structure of the animal organ surely encapsulates the human too, as a being that possesses organs, which is something that Heidegger never denies? Franck argues that, if captivation is 'fundamentally constitutive' of the animal, and being-in-the-world is fundamentally constitutive of *Dasein*, then Heidegger's lengthy discussion of captivation can have little relevance for *Dasein*.⁹³ This would be unproblematic, Franck says, only if it were the case that '*Dasein* were not alive and could be thought without

⁸⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §63, p. 273).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Krell (1992: 128).

⁸⁹ Ibid. 120.

⁹⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §53, p. 224).

⁹¹ Ibid., §60b), p. 255.

⁹² Krell (1992: 120).

⁹³ Franck (1991: 141).

organs'.⁹⁴ Does Heidegger ever manage to account for the distinction he draws between the finite temporality of animal life, and the finite temporality of human organs, or does he simply retreat back into the mysterious distinction between perishing and dying?

(v) Differentiation

The above objections to Heidegger's comparative examination are based on the idea that, in the end, Heidegger pays little attention to animals and is concerned with them only as a contrast case to human beings. This concern is reinforced by the observation that, within the animal realm, Heidegger does not recognise any significant internal differentiation. He states that the thesis that the animal is poor in world

does not tell us something merely about insects or merely about mammals, since it also includes [...] non-articulated creatures, unicellular animals like amoebae, infusoria, sea urchins and the like—all animals, *every* animal. Expressed in a rather extrinsic way we could say that our thesis is more universal than these other propositions. Yet why is it more universal, and in what respect? Because this thesis is meant to say something about animality as such, something about the essence of the animal: it is a *statement of essence*.⁹⁵

'Animal' is therefore treated as a single category that requires no further ontological classification. Though Heidegger includes in his discussion examples of various different types of creature including birds, insects, and reptiles, he does not take seriously the possibility that among these creatures there may be multiple different kinds of world-relation. The idea that all organisms from amoebae to chimpanzees can be described by a single 'statement of essence' appears to be profoundly unscientific, or anti-scientific. The thesis on animality, Derrida says,

presupposes [...] that there is one thing, one domain, one homogeneous type of entity, which is called animality *in general*, for which any example would do the job. This is a thesis which, in its *median* character, as clearly

⁹⁴ Ibid. 144.

⁹⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §45a), p. 186.

emphasised by Heidegger (the animal *between* the stone and man), remains fundamentally teleological and traditional.⁹⁶

Heidegger considers only two distinctions to be necessary for his investigation into different world-relations: that between non-living matter and the living organism, and that between the living organism and man. But a phenomenology of animality that does not take the trouble of at least beginning an examination of the multiple ways in which 'world' becomes manifest for different animals, which may differ, for example, between vertebrates and invertebrates, cold and warm blooded organisms, or according to cognitive capacities, seems dubious.

Calarco commends what he sees as an attempt on Heidegger's part to tackle the 'complicated relationship' between biology and philosophy, examining 'the role philosophy might play in determining the Being of animal life—a task that is often reserved solely for the sciences'.⁹⁷ However, it seems that this effort both to furnish his own metaphysical enquiry with the results of empirical research, and to ground the sciences by examining their metaphysical claims, will fall short if Heidegger fails to attend to the taxonomical customs of biology, which differentiates between beings based on myriad and minute details. Moreover, the motive behind the brute difference in kind that Heidegger examines is not itself subject to any interrogation:

Even though Heidegger initially acknowledges that 'it is difficult to determine... the distinction between man and animal'—an acknowledgement that helps to prevent his discussion from falling back into common-sense presuppositions about the human–animal distinction—the question concerning *whether such a distinction between human beings and animals can or even should be drawn* is never raised for serious discussion.⁹⁸

Krell goes a step further, arguing that it is to his detriment that Heidegger 'does not pause to wonder whether his own highest aspiration, his search for the *essence* of animality and all life in each amoeba and every ape, is the kind of high-altitude thinking that spawns all the other hierarchies' that his philosophy generally opposes.⁹⁹ Given that the task of producing a unified essence of all modes of animality is problematic from a biological perspective, and, given Heidegger's claim that his examination 'cannot be elucidated

⁹⁶ Derrida (1989: 57).

⁹⁷ Calarco (2008: 18–19).

⁹⁸ Ibid. 23.

⁹⁹ Krell (1992: 115).

independently' of the life sciences, there appears to be an internal confusion in his methodology.¹⁰⁰

Concluding Remarks on the Hierarchising Charge

The implication of this analysis appears to be that Heidegger's definition of animality is a privative, unimaginative, ontotheological one that begins from the perspective of our own human existence and deducts various ontologically significant traits from it. Commentators see an unapologetic anthropocentrism in this preoccupation with the human. Having dismissed *Lebensphilosophie* in *Being and Time* for failing to ground or even approach the meaning of 'life', Heidegger is then unable to establish a vision of life and the human's relationship to life that is not 'expressed in terms of addition, subtraction or privation'.¹⁰¹ Heidegger's fatal error, according to MacIntyre, is to base his investigation into animality on the premise that 'we can *only* understand nonhuman animals by contrast with our own human condition and what all nonhuman animals share is a lack of what human beings have: a relationship to beings in which not only are beings disclosed, but the difference between beings and being is disclosed'.¹⁰² For MacIntyre, this grouping together of all non-human animals not only disregards the many and complex differences between species; it also misses the significance of the human's relationship to its own animality and naturalness.¹⁰³ In striving so hard to keep humans and non-humans apart, Heidegger fails to recognise what our kinship to animals, the great apes in particular, can reveal about our own human existence and behaviour:

[O]ur whole initial bodily comportment towards the world is originally an animal comportment, and [...] when, through having become language-users, we under the guidance of parents and others restructure that comportment, elaborate and in new ways correct our beliefs and redirect our activities, we never make ourselves independent of our animal nature and inheritance.¹⁰⁴

To an extent, this close kinship with animals is due to the fact that aspects of our physiology are unchanged. In cases where certain human traits appear

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]): §45a), p. 187).

¹⁰² MacIntyre (1999: 45).

¹⁰³ Ibid. 48.

¹⁰¹ Krell (1992: 104).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 49.

to indicate a gulf of difference between the human and the animal, we should not assume that, just because many of the human's characteristics will be modulated as it becomes enculturated into a specific society, that the genesis of these characteristics is not fundamentally natural or animalistic. For MacIntyre, the fact that we have developed our own peculiarly human ways of 'being-in-the-world' does not mean that we are justified in making the further, anthropocentric inference that being-in-the-world *as such* is an exclusively human privilege. All in all, the lectures fail, according to MacIntyre, to complete their original task of determining the animality of the animal.

Almost all commentators on Heidegger's animal lectures express the concerns discussed in this chapter. They all stem from the basic worry that Heidegger reasserts a range of humanist prejudices in a new vocabulary and, in so doing, strikes up a paradoxical relationship to the life sciences in which he attempts to adopt their perspective while simultaneously neglecting some of their most important findings. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that the analytic of Dasein is to be differentiated from anthropology and biology, which, despite their 'objective fertility', are unable to grasp Dasein as a whole in its essential ground.¹⁰⁵ However, shortly after this observation has been made, it seems that, in *FCM*, Heidegger wishes to reject, outright, certain aspects of this scientific fertility. While intending to seek support for his three theses by drawing on zoology and biology, Heidegger fails to provide convincing counterarguments to the empirical claims that undermine them. After initially expressing optimism about the relationship between metaphysics and science, Heidegger then weaves in and out of the empirical material in a way that leaves the reader unclear regarding the precise role biology and zoology are playing in the analysis. The thesis on animality, which is expressed as an absolutist metaphysical maxim, would not be palatable from a zoological perspective, since, as Calarco points out, no zoologist or ethologist 'would be willing to make statements about the world-relations of animals *as such* when such structures have yet to be investigated empirically in most animal species'.¹⁰⁶ If the fundamental aim is, as the commentators discussed in this chapter all seem to believe, to safeguard the position of the human as an entity that is separated off from the animal by an abyss of essence, rather than to ascertain

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §10, p. 71).

¹⁰⁶ Calarco (2008: 27).

the essence of animality, then it is not clear why Heidegger needs to refer at such length to zoology and biology.

Even if the aim of the lectures is simply to secure the status of Dasein's being, the anthropocentrism of this attempt seriously confuses matters. While it is clear, from the perspective of commentators including Derrida, Krell, and Glendinning, that the lectures elevate the human above the animal, they also leave the impression that the human's own distinct form of life is so insignificant when it comes to the essence of human existence that it is not worth serious consideration. Heidegger insists that his investigation 'allows no evaluative ranking or assessment with respect to completeness or incompleteness', because when we compare our bodies with those of other creatures we find that we have none of their sensory acuity and physiological robustness:

[W]e immediately find ourselves in the greatest perplexity over the question concerning greater or lesser completeness in each case with respect to the accessibility of beings, as soon as we compare the discriminatory capacity of a falcon's eye with that of the human eye, or the canine sense of smell with our own, for example.¹⁰⁷

This statement contains a rare mention of human organic capacities, which are characterised negatively, as lacking the keenness of the falcon's or dog's equivalent organs. The question arises as to whether Heidegger considers the human body to be irrelevant to his account of the essence of the human, and if this is why he does not discuss the bodily kinship between humans and other primates. Not only is the human body treated as an ontologically non-essential adjunct; it is described as somehow meagre when compared to the high functionality of the animal organ. On the one hand, the human body appears to be a kind of radicalisation of the organism on account of the human's capacity for selfhood, which enables it to 'let beings be'. On the other hand, however, human senses are described, in the passage just quoted, as being comparatively feeble.

A general suspicion concerning Heidegger's capacity to deal with the body and the question of the animality of the human is already present in receptions of *Being and Time*. Commentators complain that in this text Heidegger does not dedicate any space to the human organism as the vehicle

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]): §46, p. 194.

that enables Dasein to have any type of world-relation. Didier Franck argues that, despite his neglect of the body, 'the being of the equipment as being-at-hand presupposes the being of the hand, something that nothing in the hermeneutic gives us to understand since the ecstatic constitution of existence cannot be reconciled with its incarnation'.¹⁰⁸ This ineluctable division between existence and incarnation, which, Franck argues, ultimately implies that 'the disappearance of the body is the *phenomenological price* for the appearance of Being', means that Heidegger's analytic of Dasein fails to incorporate what Jonas describes as the 'crass and demanding materiality' of the body into his vision of the essence of man.¹⁰⁹

Having placed Heidegger's comparative examination in the context of the problem of the living body in *Being and Time*, we are left with two concerns. First, Heidegger's analysis appears to derogue animality by placing it below humanity. Secondly, Heidegger never manages to face up to the notion that, like world-poverty, world-formation is housed within a perishable body containing a system of organs. He therefore also appears to derogue the animality *in* the human both by refusing to discuss it and by alluding to it as meagre in comparison to the far more acute and well-adapted animal organism. Both of these problems concern Heidegger's relationship to positive science in *FCM*. In *Being and Time* this matter is clearer: biology, anthropology, and psychology are regional ontologies that cannot describe Dasein in its essential ground, and Heidegger therefore marginalises them. However, in Part Two of *FCM*, Heidegger wishes to place biology and zoology at the centre of his investigation. He carefully examines some of the most recent breakthroughs in biology, while apparently attempting to avoid biology's metaphysical commitments. This deepens the perplexity of Heidegger's appropriation of biology further and, I think, calls for a different approach.

Introducing a New Approach to Heidegger's Reflections on Animality

The suspicions of the commentators discussed in this chapter appear entirely reasonable. It is certainly unclear whether Heidegger will be able to glean any insights from biology if he insists on preserving an unbridgeable gulf between human and animal life. What, then, are we to make of his decision to follow

¹⁰⁸ Franck (1991: 144).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 146; Jonas (1994: 820).

his postulation of metaphysically abstract, classical divisions between beings with a close engagement with contemporary biology? Is the amount of biological research in the lecture course merely a matter of academic diligence, as Krell believes it is?¹¹⁰ If Heidegger has already made up his mind about the 'essentiality' of these distinctions, then any inclusion of biological research is surely redundant, especially an inclusion of such detailed material.

However, if *FCM* does indeed promote the type of hierarchical prejudices that commentators charge it with, the entire project would be so transparently vulnerable to criticism that this possibility seems unlikely. If we accept the Derridean view that Heidegger's thought on animals remains continually saturated with a humanistic, evaluative attitude to animal life, then *FCM* looks like just another instance of this prejudicial stance. But, if we consider the fact that Derrida himself notes how unusual the formulation of the three theses appears to be in the broader context of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, as well as the fact that Derrida claims that he will 'skip' large sections of Heidegger's analysis of biology and zoology in his own discussion, which debars him from a detailed appreciation of these sections, then *FCM*'s three theses and the biological principles they ostensibly allude to begin to look as though they warrant further examination.¹¹¹

I wish to develop a response to Heidegger's reflections on animality that contains a hermeneutic clarity and charity that I consider to be lacking in the various interpretations detailed above. Upon closer consideration, it seems unlikely that Heidegger, who is generally not averse to making metaphysical claims that lack deep empirical substantiation and exemplification, would include a long discussion of empirical science research for the sake of academic diligence. Krell describes the ease with which, in general, Heidegger's thought denounces the possibility that 'essences' may be sought in ontic properties: technology is nothing technological, humanity nothing humanistic, and so on.¹¹² Why then, would Heidegger bother to shore up his investigation into the world-relation of the animal with myriad results of

¹¹⁰ Krell (2013: 67).

¹¹¹ Note that Derrida (2008: 143) claims that he cannot take into account Heidegger's very involved discussion of biology and 'ethological knowledge' in the lectures. Similarly, he claims (Derrida 2011: 45) that he will read *FCM* alongside Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which will inevitably involve 'crossing our eyes' and 'squinting' in an attempt to deal with both alongside one another. Krell (1992: 93) himself acknowledges the vital issue of the 'reciprocal relation of philosophy and the life sciences' in Heidegger's thought and comments on the need to 'look carefully' at how Heidegger 'respond[s] to science'; however, he does not undergo this examination himself in his reading of *FCM*, despite the fact that, in this text, the relationship that Heidegger stages between metaphysics and biology is continually at stake.

¹¹² Krell (1992: 114).

laboratory experiments, particularly when his thought tends to be abstract and alien from the perspective of the sciences? Is it perhaps the case that these results have a more profound significance for his investigation, that his speculations regarding biology are in the service of more subtle, deeper goals that are not immediately obvious? Though both Derrida and Krell allude to the significant character of Heidegger's dialogue with the sciences in *FCM*, neither undergoes a deep examination of this dialogue.

The alternative interpretation of *FCM* that I will present in the remainder of this book will argue that the 'standard' hierarchising charge described here rests on a profound misunderstanding, insofar as it neglects the very specific metaphysical context in which Heidegger makes claims about animality. Out of the many sections of the lecture course, commentators on *FCM* focus most sharply on the few in which Heidegger outlines his comparative examination.¹¹³ There are various reasons why this commentary is dedicated almost exclusively to this part of the lecture course, and I will explore these reasons towards the end of the book. I now wish to begin to unfurl the contents of the many unexplored passages that surround and frame Heidegger's comparative examination in order to establish a new approach. In this new approach I will demonstrate another side to *FCM* as a cohesive metaphysical project with dramatic, under-celebrated ambitions, ambitions that cannot possibly be captured in isolated readings of the 'animal lectures'.

Specifically, I will argue that the hierarchising charge falls short, because it tends to divorce the sections on animality from two important contexts. The first, which I will term the 'internal' context of Heidegger's comparative examination, is the wider metaphysical project contained in the lecture course itself. The second, which I will term the 'external' context, consists of the climate of life-science research at the time of *FCM*, on which Heidegger draws heavily. I hope that, by attending to these two contexts, it will be possible to provide a deeper picture of what is going on in Heidegger's comparative examination and how we should respond to the idea of a metaphysical abyss between the human and the animal.

¹¹³ An exception is Withy (2013: 162), in which the author seeks to bring together the 'disparate analyses' of Heidegger's lecture course, concluding that the lectures are an attempt by Heidegger to offer us 'therapeutic' relief from the pains of profound boredom. I share Withy's interest in unifying the apparently disconnected sections of *FCM* but disagree with the claim that Heidegger is engaging in the kind of therapeutic project that the lectures explicitly reject, and my own conclusions will differ.

2

The Metaphysical Context of Heidegger's Animal Analysis

*Retrieving the Neglected Sections of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics**

A quick glance at the contents pages of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (FCM) reveals just how limited an amount of space is dedicated to the theme of animal life. Of the fourteen chapters, the animal features in three. The title of the lecture course designates its subject matter as the three 'fundamental concepts of metaphysics': world, finitude, and solitude; no mention of animals, life, or biology. And yet, as the previous chapter sought to show, Heidegger's zoological reflections, which come towards the end of the text, are the foremost association that FCM has in secondary literature. This would be unproblematic, were it not for the fact that the eleven chapters that surround Heidegger's claims about biology and animal life construct a critical metaphysical context in which to understand these claims. Derrida and others object to the idea of a metaphysical 'abyss of essence' separating the human from the animal, but they do not pay sufficient attention to the specific context of Heidegger's claims. Ignoring this context means that the claims appear random, uncharacteristic, and spurious. In this chapter I will begin to retrieve this lost metaphysical background by examining Heidegger's *Preliminary Appraisal*, comprised of the three opening chapters, in which Heidegger delimits the scope and aims of the entire lecture course and gives us vital context for exploring the material on animality that comes later. If we examine Heidegger's prefatory reflections, we soon discover that he takes as his primary aim not the production of a comparative account of animal life, but rather the extension of a kind of 'invitation' to learn about what philosophy is and to do philosophy for ourselves. Heidegger appears to want to engender, among his listeners, an attitude that will enable them to do metaphysics for themselves and, ultimately, to grasp world, finitude, and solitude as the perennial, most foundational, concepts of metaphysics. Bracketing any prior

knowledge of philosophy that his listeners may be in possession of, Heidegger attempts, in an almost Hegelian spirit, to start at the beginning and lay out what is at stake in the very concept of metaphysics, and from there to witness the manner in which this concept mutates throughout the history of philosophy. Heidegger claims that it is only by gaining an understanding of what metaphysics itself is that we will be capable of comprehending the idea of a fundamental concept of metaphysics.¹

Heidegger notes that this endeavour to define metaphysics immediately proves to be obscurely complex. This is chiefly because metaphysics tends to be reduced to other disciplines, masquerading as both 'science' and 'worldview'.² However, Heidegger insists that metaphysics is unlike either of these branches of knowledge in an important respect: metaphysics uses its own resources to question itself. Unlike the positive sciences, which are unable either to pose or to answer the question of their origin and conceptual ground from within that ground, metaphysics determines itself in and through its own activity. To this extent, metaphysics cannot be treated as a 'fixed discipline', one that we encounter externally.³ If this seems counter-intuitive, it is because we are so accustomed to thinking of metaphysics, alongside logic, ethics, or epistemology, as a philosophical field of study among others. Heidegger claims that this illusion that metaphysics is a single fixed discipline within philosophy inspires the further illusion that, like the sciences, it is specific and circumscribable, and also capable of making progress.⁴

If philosophy is not to be thought of as a science, and is not capable of either certainty or progress, does this mean that it is merely the somewhat arbitrary 'proclamation of a worldview'?⁵ Heidegger insists that this manner of questioning creates a false dichotomy: metaphysics possesses none of the epistemic security of science and none of the cultural ephemerality of worldview.⁶ It cannot be determined comparatively using these epiphenomena, but only from within itself. In this respect, metaphysics is something foundational, something that '*stands on its own*, something *ultimate*'.⁷ This bold, wholesale rejection of worldview as a basis for philosophising places Heidegger in a somewhat vulnerable position. He will have to convince us that the contents of *FCM* do not amount to 'worldview in disguise', that his own attempt to bring us to the threshold of philosophy is not comparable with the non-essential cultural psychology that he abjures. This suspicion

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §§1–2).

⁴ Ibid. 2.

² Ibid., §1a), p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

cannot be dealt with until we have looked in more detail at the conception of philosophy, and of ourselves as prospective philosophers, that Heidegger lays out in *FCM*.

At the start of the lectures Heidegger indicates that, for Aristotle, the activity of 'genuine' philosophy, of 'First Philosophy', was not a process of 'going beyond' in the sense of accessing a suprasensible domain, but was instead an enquiry into both 'beings' and 'the being of beings': *ousia*.⁸ These were not treated as two separate subject matters, but were rather two orientations of a single enquiry. The interpretation of metaphysics after Aristotle was, Heidegger argues, obscured and trivialised. This trivialisation was firstly due to what Heidegger describes as the 'embarrassing' response to the practical dilemma of how to organise Aristotle's corpus, given that First Philosophy could not be easily incorporated into the three established schools of physics, ethics, and logic, which led to the arbitrary definition of First Philosophy as *μετά τά φυσικά*, 'behind' or 'alongside' physics.⁹ Secondly, the definition was recast via its Latinisation *metaphysica* as 'going beyond' something towards something else, which breaks with the unity of First Philosophy and contains an implicit ranking of certain classes of being—those beyond the sensible—as separate, 'higher', and 'over above' others: 'This turning away of philosophy proper from nature as one particular domain, from any such domain at all, is a *going over beyond* individual beings, *over to this other*'.¹⁰ For Heidegger, this trivialisation and 'confusion' is nothing less than a decision that determines '*the fate of philosophy proper in the West*'. The prefix 'meta', he says, has come to be used as a way of designating a discipline that goes 'above' another discipline, such as meta-geometry.¹¹

Heidegger's core aim in the lecture course is to provide a stage for turning back towards the profundity and ambiguity of the original conception of metaphysics. The task of the lectures is to bracket the misunderstanding and subsequent 'changeover' of the meaning of First Philosophy and to establish what 'metaphysics' means in the title of the lecture course, not by interpreting First Philosophy 'in terms of metaphysics', but by '[justifying] the expression "metaphysics" via an originary interpretation of what is at issue in the *πρώτη φιλοσοφία* of Aristotle'.¹²

Heidegger acknowledges throughout the opening passages of the lectures that this will be a monumental task. Heidegger's examination of the

⁸ Ibid., §11 b), p. 39.

¹¹ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., §11 a), p. 38.

¹² Ibid., §12, p. 41.

¹⁰ Ibid., §11 b), p. 39.

etymology of the term 'metaphysics' reinforces his claim that there is something enigmatic about metaphysics that cannot be captured via comparisons with either science or worldview, something that eludes and precedes these categories.¹³ Rather than determining metaphysics negatively via a comparison with other disciplines, we need to embark on the task of the lectures by confronting it directly, in all its ambiguity. It will then be possible, Heidegger claims, to see the important distinctions between it and these other fields of investigation.¹⁴ However, this way of proceeding is problematic, for how will we know when we are 'confronting metaphysics directly', doing metaphysics for ourselves, if we have not yet determined what it is? The etymological examination revealed a profound ambivalence to the term, but did not result in a clear definition, or lay the groundwork for a confrontation with metaphysics. So far, Heidegger says, no clue has been given as to how we can begin doing metaphysics, and metaphysics itself is still lost in obscurity; philosophy 'parades in the marketplace in manifold illusory forms or even disguises'.¹⁵

Unlike scientific enquiry, metaphysics cannot be embarked upon *ex nihilo*. Heidegger argues that it is only when we develop our analysis *from within* a 'metaphysical questioning', one that is already underway, that we are able to do philosophy, rather than simply talk about doing it.¹⁶ The necessity of this prior embeddedness within metaphysics means that we must become 'gripped' (*ergriffen*) by metaphysical questioning in order to begin metaphysics.¹⁷ Heidegger's claim is in fact more specific than this. The aim, he says, is not simply to recognise that we must first be 'gripped' by metaphysical questioning in order to become acquainted with metaphysics and its three fundamental concepts. Rather, we need to access the manner in which *we ourselves* are gripped by metaphysical concepts at this particular historical stage. The challenge is not merely to apprehend world, finitude, and solitude as abstract concepts that circumscribe the entire history of philosophy, but to come to know these concepts for ourselves qua contemporary *Dasein*.

How, though, are we to go about becoming 'gripped' by metaphysics in our own time? Heidegger hints that intimate knowledge of our own manner of being gripped first requires knowledge of the history of metaphysics as an activity, a history that determines how things are for us now.¹⁸ However, even if we examine the birth of metaphysics and then pursue an

¹³ Ibid., §12a)-b).

¹⁶ Ibid., §15, p. 57.

¹⁴ Ibid., §4, p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., §4, p. 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., §1c), p. 3.

understanding of the operation of this ‘ultimate’ activity by looking at the manner in which philosophers have been ‘gripped’ by metaphysical questions from antiquity onwards, we still find that the ‘essence’ of metaphysics ‘withdraws’ from us.¹⁹ Knowledge of the history of metaphysics, on its own, is not enough. In order for it to facilitate our entry into metaphysics, this knowledge must be supplemented with a deep realisation that can come only from us as prospective metaphysicians. Without this realisation, knowledge of the history of metaphysics will not enable us to break the surface of metaphysics and ‘do metaphysics for ourselves’. He insists that we can reach this realisation only by questioning why it is that, in our attempts to pursue a definition of metaphysics, metaphysics has thus far eluded us.

If we pursue this question, we eventually discover that the activity of pursuing beings in their being belongs to *physis* as a peculiarly human activity. This fact does not appear to be especially problematic; it does, however, belie a deeper, more complex relationship between the human and metaphysics. Heidegger claims that, when we examine metaphysics more closely, we find that the human being *is* this turn towards beings, this peculiar element of the field of *physis* that allows for the apprehension and articulation of *physis* as a whole.²⁰ This is the realisation that Heidegger wants us to reach. However, it is not immediately obvious why this fact, apparently so critical for us as prospective metaphysicians, should mean that metaphysics ‘withdraws’ from us, or why this fact should render problematic the task that Heidegger presents in *FCM*: ‘[H]ow and to where can metaphysics as philosophising, as our own human activity, withdraw from us, if we ourselves are, after all, human beings?’²¹ This question seems reasonable until we consider the implications of an even more fundamental question: ‘Yet do we in fact know what we ourselves are? What is man?’²²

If we are to access metaphysics, we must grapple with this question. The question immediately exposes us to a deranging circularity. In order to do metaphysics, we first need to understand what a human being is. However, metaphysics itself is the discipline that is capable of formulating and addressing this fundamental question. Each field of enquiry already presupposes and incorporates the other: the question of the essence of metaphysics sits within the question of the essence of the human and vice versa. Suddenly *FCM* looks like an invitation, not only to philosophise, but to come to know ourselves as the beings that philosophise, or, more accurately, to realise that

¹⁹ Ibid., §2b), p. 7.

²⁰ Ibid., §2a), p. 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

these activities are one and the same. When Heidegger remarks in *Being and Time* that the idea of *Lebensphilosophie*—the ‘philosophy of life’—says about as much as the “botany of plants”, he is getting at the foundational and inseparable co-belonging between philosophy and human existence, the fact that philosophy necessarily reflects back upon life insofar as it is a direct expression of the human being’s own form of life.

If metaphysics as an activity is conceptually coextensive with the human as the being that brings this activity about, this means that its three fundamental concepts—world, finitude, and solitude—will also be inseparable from an understanding of man’s being. Though a detailed comprehension of this relation between Dasein and world, finitude and solitude, is not immediately provided in the *Preliminary Appraisal*, eventually Heidegger will reveal the ways in which these three concepts constitute the fabric of Dasein qua metaphysical being. Prior to looking in more detail at how these concepts intersect both metaphysics and human existence, I want further to explore the origin of these two orientations, which are introduced in *FCM* as the core subject matters of the entire lecture course. We do not have to look too far to understand the claim that it is the human who philosophises, that it belongs to our species to enquire into its own being and its place among other beings. However, Heidegger is not slipping in this conception of the reciprocal relation between the human and metaphysics as a convenient premise that we should accept *prima facie*. If we read his account of the meaning of metaphysics as an exercise of ‘going beyond’ beings in pursuit of being, we find that this ‘going beyond’ is the human’s own peculiar manner of being, that it is a co-belonging that *constitutes* both the human and metaphysics rather simply being a relation between them.

The Genesis of Metaphysics: The Human’s Peculiar Relationship to *Physis*

Though Heidegger has not yet provided any succinct instruction concerning how we go about ‘becoming gripped’ by metaphysics, by framing our prospective encounter with metaphysics as a process of becoming gripped, he has implicitly revealed what he considers to be the most important feature of the ‘co-belonging’ between us as human beings and metaphysics. Heidegger claims that it would not be necessary for us to become gripped at all, were it the case that we are already held fast to what we are attempting to

comprehend.²³ The fact that metaphysics is a process of striking out beyond *physis* presupposes that the position of the human, qua metaphysical being, is not fixed within *physis*. We are thus beginning to discover something about ourselves as the beings that are predisposed towards metaphysics.

Heidegger clarifies this idea that the human's position within *physis* is somehow unhinged through a closer examination of the concept of *physis* itself. His claim that *physis* cannot be defined as the 'conceptual counterpart of history' not only provides an important clue to the deep ambiguity of the original concept of *physis*, but also hints at the profound way in which the human is implicated in the activity of metaphysics. The definition of *physis* as a correlate of history is inappropriate, Heidegger says, because *physis* does not simply name the domain of animals and plants but also 'irrupts in the primal experience of man'.²⁴ Humans, like other living beings, belong to *physis*. However, though the human is part of *physis*, 'entwined' within it just as primordially as all other living beings, it has a deviant relationship to *physis* in the sense that, as the being who partakes in the *logos*, it has always already 'spoken out' about *physis* from within it:

In Greek, speaking is called *λέγειν*; the prevailing that has been spoken out is the *λόγος*. Therefore—it is important here to note this from the outset, as we shall see more precisely from the evidence—it belongs to the essence of prevailing beings, insofar as man exists among them, that they are spoken out in some way. If we conceive of this state of affairs in an elementary and originary way, we see that what is spoken out is already necessarily within *φύσις*, otherwise it could not be spoken from out of it. To *φύσις*, to the prevailing of beings as a whole, there belongs this *λόγος*.²⁵

Here we see that the examination of the ambiguity of the term *physis* turns naturally towards an examination of the ambiguity of the human and its relationship to *physis*. The human embodies a peculiar ambivalence to the extent that it is both part of *physis* and capable of 'speaking out' about *physis* in the *logos*. Heidegger argues that, when we consider the original meaning of *physis* and its relation to the human, we discover a mysterious state of balance between the human, on the one hand, and the beings in *physis* that the human speaks out about, on the other. Heidegger has claimed that the human is the articulator of beings, but *logos* is described in the passage just

²³ Ibid., §2b), p. 7.

²⁴ Ibid., §8a), p. 25.

²⁵ Ibid., §8b), p. 26.

quoted as part of the fabric of *physis*, something that belongs, first and foremost, to *physis* rather than the human. It is, therefore, not simply the case that the human uses its faculties to articulate *physis* from a position of detachment; rather, the beings belonging to *physis* incorporate a drive towards articulation ‘insofar as man exists amongst them’. Heidegger punctuates *FCM* with explorations of this enigmatic idea. His aims in these introductory passages are to kick-start these explorations by registering the profound ambiguity of the Greek conception of the human’s position and role in *physis* and to argue that the investigation into metaphysics has landed at the shores of this tension.

Heidegger claims that, according to this ancient, ambiguous understanding, the human is tied into the realm of *physis* in a dual sense.²⁶ Its own form of life is such that it ‘exists among’ natural beings, and it is also the being that, via its participation in the *logos*, is the medium through which *physis* is given expression. Like all beings, the human embodies a drive towards articulation. However, Heidegger indicates that it is only within the human—the articulator of beings—that we find an internal struggle. Though the human’s relationship to *physis* appears, at first glance, to amount to a peculiar detachment and freedom from the natural terrain that encapsulates all other beings, it is also one that subjects it to a dissonant existence: though the human is the being that is able somehow to ‘go beyond’ *physis*, a going-beyond that enables it to do metaphysics, insofar as it exists among those beings about which it speaks out, it will never be able to complete this exercise. This is because it is part of the very totality that it attempts to disclose, and it will thus never be able to detach from *physis* in order to attain an elevated, de-situated perspective that can capture everything belonging to it.

This peculiar status of the human within *physis* provides some explanation as to why the human would need to ‘become gripped’ in order to do metaphysics—that is, to undergo a direct examination of *physis* from within its own position, its own extendedness beyond *physis*. The human is *essentially* not gripped, not held fast to *physis*. This need to be ‘gripped’ ultimately pertains to a distinction that runs throughout *FCM* and has already been introduced via Heidegger’s discussion of the original Greek conception of the two poles of *physis*. According to this ancient understanding, *physis* names not only beings that ‘prevail’ but also the ‘prevailing’ of these beings.

²⁶ Ibid.

This amounts to a distinction between the plethora of beings that exist and the *being* of these beings. Heidegger phrases this difference respectively as ‘beings as a whole’ versus ‘beings as such’. Dasein, Heidegger has said, is the only being that ‘speaks out of the whole and into it’—that is, not only is it part of the whole, one among the beings that exist; it is also capable of speaking *into* the domain of beings, of determining, via the *logos*, what these beings ‘are’ ‘as such’.²⁷ Dasein, Heidegger says, cannot ‘stick to beings’, cannot ‘get by without being’, without ‘essence’, because it finds itself unhinged from the domain of beings; it represents a peculiar schism in the field of *physis* insofar as it is capable of detaching from *physis* in order to attempt to take in ‘the whole’.²⁸ This detachment and estrangement from the domain of beings as a whole means that Dasein must ‘grip’ onto beings. Following the meaning of the German *begreifen*, this ‘gripping’ amounts to conceptualising or understanding beings rather than simply receiving them passively. Heidegger describes this primordial detachment, which impels Dasein to access ‘being’ as well as ‘beings’, as ‘homesickness’, a condition that he describes, following Novalis, as the requisite of all philosophising—that is, the process of man’s becoming ‘gripped’.

From within the dead ends and failed attempts to isolate a succinct definition of metaphysics, we are thus provided with something more philosophically potent than a straightforward definition: an understanding of the complex interplay between the human, *physis*, and *logos* that first enables all of our previous attempts. Though the ‘speaking out’ that characterises the human appears to grant it a superior position, it also consigns it to an endless, insatiable struggle. The relationship between *logos* and *physis* expresses this struggle: the Greek sense of the *logos*, as that exercise of uncovering through which beings are revealed, implies that beings are first and foremost concealed. The ‘coming to word’ ($\lambda\acute{e}γ\epsilon\iota\omega$) of *physis* in Greek thought first depends upon the opposite concept: *κρύπτειν*, to hide or cover.²⁹ *Physis*, then, is primarily self-concealing. This concealment, Heidegger says, is implied in the negative *a-* prefix in the Greek *aletheia*, which, like the German *un-*, signifies the absence of something: ‘It expresses the fact that something is lacking in the word it prefixes. In truth beings are torn from concealment. Truth is understood by the Greeks as something stolen, something that must be torn from concealment in a confrontation in which precisely *φύσις* strives to conceal itself’.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., §75, p. 353.

²⁸ Ibid. 355.

²⁹ Ibid., §8b), p. 27.

³⁰ Ibid., §8c), p. 29.

The fact that the prevailing belonging to *physis* must be wrested from concealment indicates that it is intrinsically self-concealing. This self-concealing tendency of *physis* is described in a sentence from Heraclitus' famous and yet, Heidegger says, to this day still incomprehensible fragment: 'The prevailing of things [*physis*] has in itself a striving to conceal itself.'³¹ This sentence, for Heidegger, indicates the 'innermost connection' between *physis* and concealment.³² However, Heidegger has also claimed that *logos* is an operation that belongs to *physis*; it is not a 'component' of the human.³³ Beings, as Heraclitus says, embody a drive towards concealment, but this very drive presupposes and is directed towards the possibility of unconcealment. Heidegger argues that beings make themselves amenable to unconcealment; 'insofar as man exists among them', they seek out expression through man's articulation of them.³⁴ There is, therefore, an ambiguous parallel between the human and the non-human case. The human incorporates a drive to unconceal, and beings incorporate a drive for unconcealment that is manifested, first and foremost, as withdrawal and concealment. Beings can be pursued only insofar as they try to hide; their self-hiding is ultimately an invitation to be removed from concealment. As the being that initiates this unconcealment, the human is exemplary of *physis* as a whole, since it brings this ambiguous dynamic of concealment and unconcealment to the surface. Moreover, the human's own form of *physis*, like all aspects of *physis*, is part of the dynamic of concealment. Insofar as they belong to *physis*, all of the human's activities, including metaphysics, tend towards concealment. Heidegger insists that, if we are to understand metaphysics, and the portion of *physis* that is occupied by the human, we must negotiate this elusive disposition shared by *physis*, metaphysics, and the human.

Heidegger's analysis has revealed a broad and nebulous definition of *physis* as an all-encompassing concept that envelops the human but that is at the same time self-concealing and unattainable. The unattainability of *physis* for the human stems first from the fact that the human is restricted to 'speaking' out about *physis* from within *physis*, and, secondly, from the connection between truth and a kind of negativity, indicated in the *a-* prefix of *aletheia*. Far from being grounded in the clarity of logical proof, truth represents a profound conflict. Heidegger's language even hints at a certain kind of violence: beings must be 'torn' from concealment.³⁵ Aletheic truth is strife-like, because *physis* is self-concealing, meaning that entities must be

³¹ Ibid., §8b) p. 27.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. 26.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. 27.

wrested into appearance via the *logos* and are not simply given. Truth, Heidegger says, is 'something stolen'.³⁶

This conception of the human being's relationship to *physis* further complicates the traditional idea that metaphysics, as the activity of 'going beyond' the '*physika*', is a 'fixed and secure discipline' among other disciplines.³⁷ All other fields of enquiry are parasitic upon this fundamental activity of speaking out of *physis* about *physis* via the *logos*, and, in this sense, metaphysics, as the expression of this speaking out, is something irreducible and exclusive. The human is the only being that takes part in the activity of the *logos* and is therefore the only being that does metaphysics. This could be interpreted as an advantage; Heidegger, however, insists that this connection to the *logos* arises as a result of an essential negativity in the human understood as the locus of a struggle, a 'wrestling' (*entreißen*) within *physis*. This means that the human cannot passively apprehend the beings that belong to *physis* but must strive to generate meaning from these beings, one in which they become coherent in specific ways, a world in which they show up both 'as a whole' and 'as such'. Metaphysics is, therefore, envisaged as the offspring of a kind of constitutive brokenness in the human, described later in the lecture course as a 'rupturing' (*Gebrochenheit*) via which *Dasein* 'comes to' its existence, a rupturing that occurs '*within Dasein itself*'.³⁸

This idea of philosophy as the outcome of a kind of rupturing in the human—that is, an absence of stability—challenges the concept of philosophising as a form of elevated contemplation, envisaging it, not as 'some blissful awe', but as 'the struggle against the insurmountable ambiguity of all questioning and being'.³⁹ Philosophy is understood here as the outcome of a negativity that is part of the fabric of *Dasein*. Novalis's use in his fragment of the term *Trieb* captures this conception of philosophy as a visceral urge rather than the apotheosis of human activity.

Heidegger describes the manifestation of this negativity in two ways. First, *Dasein*, as a finite being, is from its very inception exposed to the constant possibility of the imminent negation of its existence. Exposure to the fact of this finitude, Heidegger says, means that the human 'is that inability to remain and is yet unable to leave his place [...] the *Da-sein* in him constantly *throws* him into possibilities and thereby keeps him *subjected* to what is actual'.⁴⁰ Secondly, this negativity is expressed in the inevitable struggle pertaining to the fact that, 'insofar as he exists', the human 'has

³⁶ Ibid., §8c), p. 29.

³⁹ Ibid., §7, p. 21.

³⁷ Ibid., §1a), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., §76, p. 365.

³⁸ Ibid., §39, p. 170.

always already spoken out about *φύσις*, about the prevailing whole to which he himself belongs'.⁴¹ Dasein is the conduit through which all metaphysics occurs, but, as one among the beings towards which it is open, Dasein will never be able to reach the stance of a 'view from nowhere' and encapsulate these beings as a totality. This dubious status as both the object and the instrument of metaphysics means that there is something inherently insatiable about the human's capacity to 'speak out' about beings.

If its relationship to world were something stable, the human would not have to make an effort to render it accessible; it would not experience an 'urge' for philosophising. This account of Heidegger's creates an ambivalent image of human existence. The elevated task of metaphysics, it transpires, is rooted in a structural lack pertaining to the essence of the human. If it were not for this lack, this detachment from *physis*, there would be no need to 'gain a grip' on entities. There would thus be no metaphysics. And yet metaphysics is not itself capable of drawing the human out of its predicament but instead involves encountering this predicament directly and enduring it.

The Two Orientations of the Concepts of World, Finitude, and Individuation

From within this analysis of the human and its peculiar position in *physis*, the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics begin to take shape. The primordial relationship between the human and *physis*, the fact that the human has always already 'spoken out' about *physis*, implies that, to the extent that the human exists, it is always engaged with beings as a whole, and with beings as such. The human is, Heidegger says, 'always waiting for something', always 'called upon by something as a whole. This "as a whole" is the world'.⁴² Human existence, therefore, takes place from within a kind of lacuna in which striving for world is an ongoing project, something that is felt as a profound need but, to the extent that *physis* is self-concealing, is never simply attained. The human's entire being is structured in such a way that it reaches out towards world: 'We are underway to this "as a whole". We ourselves are this underway, this transition, this "neither the one nor the other"'.⁴³ The human does not simply 'have world', nor is it

⁴¹ Ibid., §8b), p. 26.

⁴² Ibid., §2b), p. 5.

⁴³ Ibid. 6.

simply deprived of it. The idea that the human is a ‘transition’, a movement on the way to world that is impelled by the felt absence of world, implies that there is a lack built into the structure of the human being, a lack that is not suffered by other beings. The notion that the human is ‘neither the one nor the other’ suggests that there is something incomplete about it. The fact that, in its very being, the human is the site of a reaching-out towards world, such that all of its activities take place through or alongside this overwhelming urge, is what gives world the status of a fundamental concept of metaphysics. Heidegger describes the ‘transition’ that constitutes human existence as ‘finitude’: ‘What is this oscillating to and fro between neither/nor? Not the one and likewise not the other, this “indeed, and yet not, and yet indeed”. What is the unrest of this “not”? We name it *finitude*.⁴⁴

Finitude, the second fundamental concept of metaphysics, is not an attribute of the human, but rather its ‘fundamental way of being’.⁴⁵ Insofar as the human exists, it is finite. In realising and acting in accordance with his finitude, Heidegger says, it ‘attains’ its genuine essence, its ‘existence proper’.⁴⁶ If we wish to achieve our highest potential as human beings, ‘we cannot abandon this finitude or deceive ourselves about it, but must safeguard it. Such preservation is the innermost process of our being finite.⁴⁷ It is this becoming finite that ultimately ‘individuates’ every Dasein. Individuation, the third fundamental concept of metaphysics, does not refer to the self-assertion of the human’s individual ego. Rather it names ‘that *solitariness* in which each human being first of all enters into a nearness to what is essential to all things, a nearness to world’.⁴⁸ This ‘solitariness’, for Heidegger, is to be understood as the originary ‘homesickness’ that results in Dasein’s detachment from the domain of *physis*, whereas finitude, the most foundational of the three concepts, names this detachment itself.

These three fundamental concepts of metaphysics are explained, first and foremost, in terms of their primordial occurrence within the human. As well as being fundamental concepts of metaphysics, they are fundamental concepts of the human, yet ones that elude and precede all scientific, anthropological, or psychological determinations of it. The question of what metaphysics is thus remains a question about what the human being is, since the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics are activated only in and through human existence: ‘What is all this, taken together: world, finitude, individuation? What is happening to us here? What is man, that

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., §39, p. 170.

⁴⁷ Ibid. §2b), p. 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

such things happen to him in his very ground?⁴⁹ What does the essence of the human, the site of the occurrence of world, finitude, and solitude, consist in? We can now grasp more clearly Heidegger's proposition that man's existence is constituted by a rupturing in *physis*. According to this view, finitude is our very existence, our own participation in *physis*. This existence is essentially a negativity: we are within *physis* only insofar as we are separated from it. This being part of *physis* while being apart from it forms the basis of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics; it is the essence of all metaphysics. Heidegger notes that this proposition seems, from the perspective of a more contemporary standpoint, a somewhat obscure way of characterising human existence being. In modern metaphysics, he says, the human's status as a knowing subject is presupposed, not exposed and interrogated: 'the I or consciousness is precisely placed at the basis as the *most secure and unquestioned foundation* of this metaphysics.'⁵⁰ All problems of metaphysics now come 'under the aspect of a new science, which is represented by *mathematical natural science*'.⁵¹ The contemporary scientific human being, with its arsenal of empirical knowledge and techniques, is envisaged as a problem-solver, not a problem. And yet Heidegger's *Preliminary Appraisal* argues that a proper engagement with metaphysics means prising open the problem of the human. Heidegger insists that, in order to initiate this process in our own time, we must try to understand and circumnavigate the more superficial conceptions of the human and metaphysics that characterise the contemporary epoch.

The Historical Concealment of the More Primordial Conceptions of the Human and Metaphysics

Because the question of what the human being is has been covered over, along with all knowledge of the co-belonging between the human and metaphysics, the principle task of *FCM* will be especially laborious. In order to begin to do metaphysics proper, which, Heidegger claims, means discovering for ourselves the ancient relationship that the human has to *physis* and the two orientations of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics, we need to excavate the various layers of development that have occurred in the history of metaphysics; we must attempt to retrieve

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §14, p. 55.

⁵¹ Ibid. 54.

metaphysics from its characteristic self-concealment.⁵² In so doing we can come to understand our ‘contemporary situation’ and reacquaint ourselves with philosophy from within it.⁵³

Heidegger begins his analysis through an enquiry into ancient philosophy and observes that the Greeks existed in an enlightened awareness of the ‘perilous’, interminable incompleteness of the human’s existence, its compulsion to ‘tear’ beings from concealment, its inability to immerse itself within the ‘whole’ and be an undifferentiated entity among other entities.⁵⁴ Heidegger claims that, in Aristotle’s First Philosophy, the two poles of *physis*—beings as such and beings as a whole—were understood as two interrelated dimensions of *physis*, with the human understood as a being that unites these two poles in the activity of philosophising: ‘There are not two different disciplines; rather [Aristotle] designates questioning concerning beings as a whole and questioning concerning what the being of beings, their essence, their nature is, as [...] First Philosophy.’⁵⁵ Ancient philosophy thus meets its ‘acme’ with Aristotle, but Heidegger claims that it has since been in a state of decline.⁵⁶ This original awareness of the two poles of *physis*, and of philosophy as the nexus between *physis* and the human—the activity that takes in beings as such and as a whole—begins to break down. Heidegger claims that this is principally because metaphysics is no longer understood in terms of the philosophical import of its component terms: *meta* and *physika*.⁵⁷ Heidegger argues that, from the birth of Plato’s Academy onwards, the concept of ‘metaphysics’ has been subjected to a damaging scholastic ‘splitting’, wherein the field of *physis* is broken up and regionalised.⁵⁸ Rather than the human being depicted as a vehicle for the expression of *physis*, one that is embedded in *physis*, the human and *physis* come to be interpreted as distinct regions of beings. In addition, *physis* comes to be understood as a term denoting ‘the living’—that is, as a term for ‘nature’ as an object of study in the modern scientific sense.⁵⁹ Heidegger claims that this reductionist revision of the meaning of *physis* wrongly interprets ‘prevailing’ (*walten*) as ‘growth’.⁶⁰ According to Heidegger, the former term, which is linked to the Latin *valere*, ‘to be strong’, captures more accurately the original Greek conception of those beings that are included in *physis*. We now tend to reserve the term ‘growth’ for animals and plants—

⁵² Ibid., §8b), p. 26; §2, pp. 6–7.

⁵³ Ibid., §18a), p. 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid., §6b), β), p. 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., §9, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid., §10, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., §10.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 35.

⁵⁹ Ibid., §8a), p. 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

'organisms' in general—but its ancient usage included *all* beings and processes that are sustained within the fundamental dynamic of *physis*:

We here take growth and growing [...] in the quite elementary and broad sense in which it erupts in the primal experience of man: growth not only of plants and animals, their arising and passing away taken merely as an isolated process, but growth as this occurring in the midst of, and permeated by, the changing of the seasons, in the midst of the alteration of day and night, in the midst of the wandering of the stars, of storms and weather and the raging of the elements. Growing is all this taken together as one.⁶¹

This broad understanding, according to Heidegger, encapsulates all beings that sustain themselves, that manage to embody the endurance contained in the term *walten*. The modern, organismic sense of 'growth' is incapable of capturing this more essential meaning.

Heidegger claims that, in Plato's Academy, not only is the term *physis* reduced to 'the living', to an object for scientific investigation; another whole region of beings that was once understood as belonging to *physis* now comes to be divorced from it.⁶² This separation occurs with the construction of a field of entities that is seen in opposition to 'living' beings: that of *ēthos*, *ēthos*. This term 'comprises everything referring to human deed and action, including man and his activity'.⁶³ *Ēthos*, Heidegger says, means 'man's stance, the stance taken by man, in his self-conduct as a being who is distinct from nature in the narrower sense, from *physis*'.⁶⁴ A decisive distinction thus emerges between what has come to be understood as the domain of 'natural' beings as opposed to the human and all that is associated with it. This initial division, Heidegger says, marks the start of a movement towards the classification and systematisation of thought, a trend in which 'genuine questioning' begins to decline.⁶⁵ Though this systematic, regularised, and regularising approach to thinking cannot, Heidegger claims, be located in Plato's writings, it is the outcome of the attempt to establish philosophical schools: 'What effect does [the formation of schools] have? Living questioning dies out. The proper grip that held philosophical questioning is absent. And this is all the more so since what once meant being gripped in this way has come to be something known and has been spoken out.'⁶⁶ The successors of Greek philosophy have, throughout the ages,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., §10, p. 35.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 36.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 35.

situated their questions within particular areas of a general schema of philosophical thinking, concentrating on specific problems and producing tenets of philosophical understanding that can be applied to numerous situations.⁶⁷ Heidegger claims that this type of thinking, which is directed towards a pragmatic articulation of beings, is divorced from the originary 'grip' that was the genesis of Greek philosophical questioning:

What has been spoken out is taken on its own and made into a useful result, something that can be applied, something for everyone to learn and repeat. That means that everything belonging to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, the wealth of treatises and dialogues that has been handed down, is uprooted and is no longer comprehended as something rooted.⁶⁸

The subsequent history of philosophy is a process of further divisions and subdivisions, which continue to mobilise the *physis/éthos* distinction in increasingly unthinking ways. We are left with multiple subdisciplines, all of which have carved themselves from the fields of *physis* and *éthos* in the belief that these terms mark discernible, distinct categories of beings. Philosophical questions are thereby localised, confined to problems that are treated from within their own category of the schema, and according to their own specified principles and methodologies. These questions are 'dealt with' according to the individual discipline's 'methodological schema of question and proof'.⁶⁹ They are formulated from out of the problems themselves, and, though they produce communicable results, they encompass none of the 'enrootedness' of the questions originally posed by the Greeks.⁷⁰

The separation of the dimension of man's way of being from the being of *physis* triggers a reduction, generalisation, and simplification of philosophical questioning:

[B]ecause the enrootedness of [...] philosophising has been lost, the school and those who come after are left with the task of somehow stitching together the divergent elements which are now splitting apart, with the result that philosophy comes to be accessible for everyone and can be repeated by everyone. Everything that had once grown out of the most diverse questions—extrinsically unconnected, but all the more

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 35.

intrinsically rooted—now becomes rootless, heaped together in subjects according to viewpoints that can be taught and learned. The context and its rootedness are replaced by an ordering within subjects and scholastic disciplines. The question is which viewpoints now regulate the ordering of this rich material, which is no longer taken hold of at its core or in its vitality.⁷¹

Whereas the Greeks 'lived' the peculiar relation between the human and *physis*, the subsequent history of philosophy has produced a tendency towards subject-centred representation, with the anodyne result that the human is no longer compelled to confront itself directly. It is for this reason that, according to Heidegger, we tend to isolate the 'philosophy of life' as a subdivision of philosophy, without recognising, as the Greeks did, that philosophy always originates in and directs itself towards life.

Drawing on These Reflections to Comprehend the Contemporary Manner in Which the Human Is 'Gripped'

Heidegger argues that this process of increasing specialisation based around 'uprooted' concepts reaches radical heights in the contemporary age.⁷² Armed with ever-increasing amounts of information about the human being's various properties, which are provided by the multiple disciplines that deal with different aspects of human life, we are nonetheless unable to confront the question of what a human being is 'essentially'. In his 1929 lecture course *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger remarks that '[n]o time has known so much and such a variety about mankind as is the case today', and yet, 'no time has known less about what man is than the today'.⁷³ The relation that the human has to 'nature' is explained away rather than questioned by the sciences, and the original complexity of that relation—the fact that it is really a profound co-belonging—is never brought to light. This is because, as Beistegui says, the modern human being is condemned to 'face the world' from within an already determined, fixed conception of what it is, one that cannot be brought to light and questioned from within his fragmented, calculative structures of thinking: 'Greek man encountered nature as *φύσις*, or as birth to presence, and medieval man

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Heidegger (1997 [1929]: 147).

experienced nature as permeated by the eternal presence of god. Modern man, however, in facing the world as that which faces him from out of his capacity to represent it, encounters only himself.⁷⁴ The problem that arises in the contemporary epoch, according to Heidegger, is that this encounter does not take place from within an attitude of metaphysical questioning. Because the increasingly specialised information that the human possesses about itself is free-floating, detached from its conceptual origins, the human encounters itself only 'externally', piecing together particles of knowledge concerning matters such as its organic form, its cognitive capacities, its sociality, its technological accomplishments, its moral character, and so on. These themes are made up of the residue of the *physis/ēthos* division, which is itself parasitic upon the ancient conception of the human as a peculiar opening within *physis*. The 'contemporary situation', then, from within which Heidegger is addressing us in the lecture course, is littered with the debris of a non-essential division between 'the human' and nature understood as 'the living', a division that has been encircling Western thought since the establishment of Plato's Academy. This realisation finally provides clues concerning the contemporary way in which Dasein is 'gripped'. Throughout Part One of the lecture course, Heidegger argues that the historical estrangement from any real confrontation with what the human is culminates in a sense of deep ennui, in which we catch a glimpse of the superficiality of the concepts on which we rely, concepts that attempt to assert themselves in the wake of an increasingly remote understanding of the distinction between the human and life.

Heidegger argues that the contemporary situation is one in which the effort to retain a 'grip' on entities has become burdensome and laborious. The volume of detailed information we have at our disposal is not enough; we have, he suggests, become bored with ourselves. If we are to take up Heidegger's invitation, in the *Preliminary Appraisal*, to enter into an engagement with philosophy, we must seek to understand this ennui, this peculiarly contemporary boredom, and the manner in which it could potentially corrupt our path to a more originary understanding of the human, its standing within *physis*, and its propensity to do metaphysics. Understanding this boredom with ourselves is, therefore, the next task in the journey into metaphysics.

⁷⁴ Beistegui (2003: 94).

3

The Role of ‘Fundamental Attunement’ in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*

The Problem of Where and How to Begin Metaphysics

Heidegger argues in his *Preliminary Appraisal* at the opening of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that, unlike metaphysics, the disciplines that stem from science and worldview have already presupposed answers to the questions that they pose. Becoming acquainted with philosophy demands that we recognise the fact that neither mathematical proofs nor common-sense thinking can diminish its intrinsic ambiguity, an ambiguity that, according to Heidegger’s *Preliminary Appraisal*, arises in us qua human beings. We must, Heidegger insists, think philosophically *about* philosophy, rather than approach philosophy from the perspective of external disciplines. In other words, we must turn our examination inward towards our own philosophical disposition, rather than treat philosophy as an activity that does not already implicate us directly. This need to turn our attention towards ourselves as prospective philosophers is summarised by Heidegger’s claim that our examination of philosophy must be a ‘living’ examination.¹ Heidegger wants us to grasp the fact that metaphysics is an activity in which our very existence is at stake, and that we cannot therefore displace ourselves from the centre of the enquiry. This impossibility of setting metaphysics aside in order to examine it ‘externally’ results in ambiguity and circularity.² However, Heidegger tells us that any confusion that presents itself must be endured, or rather ‘lived’, if one is to begin to do ‘metaphysics proper’: in our attempt to ‘deal with philosophy [...] we have become victims of an ambiguity’, and the ‘fundamental task of [the] lecture

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §15, p. 57).

² Ibid., §6b), β), p. 19.

course' is to move through this ambiguity to establish 'an actual living philosophising'.³

At this point in the lecture course the path ahead is far from clear. Unable to rely on the succinct calculations of logic, and having been asked to commit to the idea that the essence of philosophy lies in its ambiguity, we are unsure how to proceed. Heidegger's response to the uncertainty that he has generated is to retreat behind the Heraclitean principle that 'the prevailing of things [*physis*] has in itself a striving to conceal itself', and that philosophy, as the activity of uncovering beings in their being, will necessarily have to negotiate their self-concealing tendency.⁴ We, as readers of the lecture course, are faced with the notion that 'certainty' is a kind of nostrum designed to insulate us from the dangerous ambiguity of philosophy and our relationship to it, with 'truth' being described as something 'stolen' and strife-like.

In the face of this sense of being lost, Heidegger takes steps to illuminate a path for us. Rather than abandoning ourselves to the hopelessness of the situation, we can at least garner an attitude of attentiveness, of 'wakefulness'; we can try to make ourselves 'ready' to encounter philosophy.⁵ First and foremost, we need, Heidegger says, to 'awaken' such a readiness for philosophising.⁶ We can 'properly undertake' genuinely philosophical questioning only when we begin to awaken what he terms a 'fundamental attunement of our philosophising'.⁷ This awakening will be 'the beginning of an actual living philosophising'.⁸

Introducing the Idea of a 'Fundamental Attunement'

Heidegger claims that we must begin this process of 'awakening' a fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) by remaining attentive and ensuring that we have managed to gain a 'grip' on entities and that we are, therefore, 'attuned' in the face of the 'turbulence' of philosophising.⁹ This attentiveness, for Heidegger, is not to be understood as a way of ameliorating the tenuousness of our situation. Rather it is an attitude that emerges *in* our being lost in ambiguity. Unlike those studying courses in science, Heidegger says, those who are studying metaphysics will have established less and less firm ground each day: 'each hour we make less progress and have instead

³ Ibid., §15, p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., §8b), p. 27.

⁵ Ibid., §19, p. 79; §6b), β), p. 19.

⁶ Ibid., §19, p. 79.

⁷ Ibid., §15, p. 57.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., §6b), β), p. 19.

increasingly approached a standstill. Not only that, but we have perhaps worn through the ground we were standing on to begin with, we have perhaps reached a place that is groundless, and begun to float, entered an *attunement*.¹⁰

Heidegger considers this desolation to be the starting point of all metaphysics, because it constitutes the conditions in which we abandon our efforts to negate the 'encircling' ambiguity of philosophy, the point at which we give ourselves over to the dizziness that it engenders, and at the same time recognise the potential contained in this dizziness. It is at this point of simultaneous resignation and awareness that a 'receptivity' for philosophising is forged.¹¹ Heidegger attempts to capture precisely this principle when he claims in the *Preliminary Appraisal* that homesickness, in the Novalian sense, is the 'fundamental attunement of all philosophising', the basic apprehension of our being lost that originally subjects us to a mode of attunement.¹² Experiencing this absence of stability motivates all of our attempts to seek out or create stability for ourselves. It is in this sense that homesickness functions as a kind of *Ur-attunement*; the most basic thing we can say of philosophy is that it *is* homesickness, 'an urge to be everywhere at home'.¹³ Understood in this way, philosophising is the result of a negativity, an insecurity, the absence of something; it is the very opposite of certainty, 'comfort', and 'assurance'.¹⁴ This idea captures the manner in which human existence is implicated in metaphysics as the locus of a 'speaking out' about *physis*, the idea that the human *is* metaphysics insofar as it is the being that embodies this primordial homesickness, this fundamental susceptibility to an attunement. The idea also emphasises Heidegger's characterisation of homesickness, and of the attunements that develop from it, as aspects of the optic through which metaphysics occurs, and not as ephemeral psychical events. Homesickness in Novalis's sense is not something cognitive; it is not a feeling or emotion; rather it is a fundamental drive (*Trieb*) for reconciliation with something lost.

The implication of this idea, presented at the opening of *FCM*, is that, prior to attunements such as boredom and anxiety, we find this primordial homesickness. From out of this originary receptivity to an attunement, the human begins to interpret the beings that surround it, including its own being; in other words, it begins to do metaphysics. However, this is not to suggest that the human being experiences itself as always and inalienably

¹⁰ Ibid., §37, p. 160.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., §2b), p. 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., §6b), β), p. 19.

detached from 'home'. In *Being and Time* Heidegger describes the way in which Dasein is immersed in various kinds of moods that suffuse all of its activities and thoroughly determine the way in which it, and its world, are made manifest. These moods are not dramatic or even conspicuous; they are part of the basic structure of our Dasein. However, despite the ordinariness of these moods, they conceal the essential structure of Dasein's primordial embeddedness in and yet detachment from beings, the fundamental way in which Dasein is 'thrown' into its 'there'.¹⁵ Beneath the 'ontically' 'most familiar' manifestation of our moods, our 'Being-attuned', there lies a fundamental openness to beings, an openness that 'brings' Being to its 'there'.¹⁶ This is the extraordinary openness that is cleaved, via the figure of the human, within *physis*, which Heidegger details at length at the start of *FCM*. This openness, despite enabling the human being to 'speak out' of *physis*, constitutes an uncanny burden for Dasein insofar as it wrests Dasein from 'beings' and subjects it to 'being'. However, 'for the most part', Heidegger says, a mood 'does not turn towards the burdensome character of Dasein which is manifest in it'.¹⁷ However, fundamental attunements reveal this 'burdensome character' directly.

The *grund* component of *Grundstimmung* has two dimensions: it denotes the capacity to expose something fundamental in Dasein, and it constitutes an optic through which fundamental metaphysical questions can properly come into focus. Beistegui describes this second sense of *grund* as that which first enables our capacity to do metaphysics: '[T]he very entry into metaphysics presupposes the prior awakening of a disposition as the very soil whence metaphysical questioning grows.'¹⁸ Fundamental attunements thus enable a kind of transparency in two directions: outwards, towards fundamental metaphysical concepts, and inwards, towards Dasein as the being that poses metaphysical questions. However, these two directions are really one and the same, insofar as Dasein is wholly implicated within metaphysics and is not a subject set against an objective world from out of which metaphysical questions emerge.

The fact that metaphysics always takes place from within an attunement is not intended to imply that the attunement itself is something 'fixed' and unchanging. As the outcome of a 'groundlessness', an attunement with its 'floating' movement fluctuates: its focus will be subject to shifts. Heidegger's *Preliminary Appraisal* seeks to document the way in which metaphysical

¹⁵ Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §29, p. 174).

¹⁶ Ibid. 172, 173.

¹⁷ Ibid. 174.

¹⁸ Beistegui (2003: 66).

enquiry has radically altered since the Greeks. He describes ancient philosophy as incorporating a deep understanding of the way in which human existence is tied into the realm of *physis* and yet unhinged from it via the *logos*.¹⁹ The Greek understanding mutates throughout the history of philosophy, in which increased areas of specialisation and disciplinary fragmentation serve to conceal this ancient conception.²⁰ Heidegger is now able to describe this mutation as the result of historical shifts in Dasein's fundamental attunements. In the wake of the ancient Greek understanding of the human being's essential structure, the human has come to be understood first as a being created in the image of God, then as a knowing subject that grounds all cognition, then as a natural entity belonging to a biological continuum. These different metaphysical 'characters' are grounded in distinct fundamental attunements. Heidegger seems to regard each of these as a way of negotiating the *Ur*-attunement of homesickness, the expression of the fundamental 'rupture' in *physis* that constitutes human existence. These fundamental attunements furnish an epoch with determinations concerning what counts as an entity, what counts as truth, and how we should conceive of our place within nature.

If it is the case that a deep understanding of the human's relationship to *physis* has been lost in the passages of history, and that we are now embedded within a set of narrow fields of research, each of which claims to know certain facts about human beings, how is it that we are able to levitate above these matrices of knowledge in order to recognise the overarching attunement of our age? And why would we be able to catch any glimpse whatsoever of the ancient conception of the human's relationship to *physis*? If the human has become so 'planetary', to borrow Haar's phrase, so profoundly subjected to the 'indifference and uniformity of the technically organised universe', so lost in its delusion that all beings, from stone, to animal, to the human being, are 'all given to us on the same level in exactly the same way', why should it be able to make statements about a long-lost, far more profound truth pertaining to its existence?²¹ Is it perhaps because there is something about our current circumstances, our contemporary 'fundamental attunement', that provides clues to this more ancient, more originary conception? Has the Greek understanding cast a long enough shadow for us to be able to piece together a complete picture of that understanding? In Part One of *FCM* Heidegger makes a case for precisely

¹⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §8).

²⁰ Ibid., §10, p. 35.

²¹ Haar (1993a: 165); Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §49, p. 207)

this idea: that, though we are caught up in the midst of a seemingly philosophically infertile mood, that of profound boredom, this mood can be exploited in such a way that we can retrieve the ancient understanding of the human's relationship to *physis*. In order to comprehend this possibility, which would enable us to continue along the path that was embarked upon in the *Preliminary Appraisal*, that of taking up Heidegger's invitation to philosophise, it is necessary to look in more detail at our 'contemporary situation' and the specific fundamental attunement that pervades it.

The Contemporary Fundamental Attunement: The Progenitor of a Division between 'Life' and 'Spirit'

Heidegger argues that, given that we ourselves are intimately caught up within and affected by the 'contemporary situation', we face a peculiar type of challenge in trying to identify and appraise it in order to retrieve its concealed philosophical value. Our best hope, he claims, is to begin by familiarising ourselves with the most exemplary interpretations of the contemporary situation that currently prevail. By examining these interpretations, we can try to 'retain' something of their '*pervasive fundamental trait*', and, in so doing, begin to glimpse their hidden philosophical import.²² In particular, Heidegger wishes very briefly to examine four 'spokespeople' of the contemporary epoch: Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages, Max Scheler, and Leopold Ziegler.²³

Though this examination is brief and somewhat unassuming (Heidegger claims that this foray into *Kulturphilosophie* is included because the four thinkers represent the received view concerning key characteristics of contemporary thinking, and not because they are philosophically enlightening on their own), the result of this examination is critical for piecing together the overarching metaphysical context of *FCM*.²⁴ More specifically, as I will soon demonstrate, the analysis begins explicitly to bind the abstract examination of metaphysics that prefaces *FCM* to Heidegger's more infamous enquiry into life, biology, and the human/animal distinction in Part Two. For Heidegger, the most striking aspect of these four interpretations, and the one that is decisive for the development of the lecture course, is that each one is based around the idea of a struggle between two fundamental and

²² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §18a, p. 69).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 71.

apparently opposed concepts: 'life' and 'spirit'. In order to understand how the dissonant relationship between these two concepts emerges in these interpretations, and why this relationship should be of great significance to Heidegger, I will take a very brief look at Heidegger's appraisal of their content.

The first and most influential interpretation of the contemporary situation is associated with Spengler and is summarised, Heidegger says, by Spengler's provocative phrase 'the decline of the West'.²⁵ The first important task for our purposes, Heidegger says, is to recognise what is implicit in this phrase.²⁶ When we reduce it to its most fundamental tenet, we find that Spengler is referring to 'the decline of life in and through spirit'.²⁷ Heidegger claims that this statement describes the peculiarly modern process whereby 'spirit', which refers to the movement of 'reason', seeks out new ways to assert itself over against 'life' by creating the world anew along technological lines.²⁸ This assertion of spirit is characterised by a dominant calculative and atomising approach to the economy and to world trade, amounting to the 'reorganisation' of existence in a manner that is epitomised by mass urbanisation.²⁹ Heidegger claims that this rational, rationalising force, according to Spengler's analysis, is now 'turning against' life, 'overwhelming it and forcing culture into decline and decay'.³⁰ Heidegger argues that the second important task is to recognise a more subtle implication of this dominant cultural motif. This is the implication of what the construction of motifs of this kind says about our time, why it is that we, as Beistegui says, 'seem to want such slogans'.³¹

The second major interpretation of the contemporary epoch is one that Heidegger associates with Ludwig Klages, and in many respects it is similar to that of Spengler. However, unlike Spengler, Klages explicitly abjures spirit, understood as *ratio*, as the insidious medium through which culture is dismantled: 'Spirit is seen as the adversary of the soul. Spirit is a sickness which has to be exorcised in order to liberate the soul. Freedom from spirit here means: let's return to life!'³² Life, in this context, does not simply refer to the realm of the organic as opposed to that of the divine or of human reason. Life has a richer symbolic meaning in this context as a chaotic, fecund domain that is the impetus behind all great poetic achievement. Life, Heidegger says, 'is now taken in the sense of the obscure simmering of drives, which is simultaneously grasped as the breeding ground of the

²⁵ Ibid. 70.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Beistegui (2003: 70).

³² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §18a), p. 70.

mythical'.³³ The third interpretation, articulated by Max Scheler, retains the theme of life versus spirit, but, instead of simply highlighting a contemporary struggle between the two, and endorsing one or the other, this interpretation takes itself to be therapeutic to the extent that it 'attempts to find a balance between life and spirit, and regards this as its task'.³⁴ The human being, Scheler says, somewhat more optimistically than Spengler and Klages, is currently 'in the epoch of a balance' between life and spirit.³⁵ Heidegger's final example incorporates aspects of the previous three. This is the interpretation of Leopold Ziegler, and it is, Heidegger says, the most 'unoriginal' and philosophically 'fragile' of the three.³⁶ This fourth interpretation anticipates a 'new Middle Ages', not a revival of what we understand as the medieval age, but a restorative middle or 'mediating' epoch in which the struggle between life and spirit can be rebalanced.³⁷

These four interpretations therefore yield what Heidegger describes as two 'catchwords': 'life' and 'spirit', and each speaks as if, to a greater or lesser extent, these concepts tend to be fundamentally inharmonious.³⁸ By isolating these catchwords, Spengler et al. have succeeded, Heidegger says, in representing an essential facet of the cultural *zeitgeist*, albeit in a wholly derivative manner: as 'stereotypes' of a particular view, the interpretations

[point] out what is known today, what is spoken of, and what in part has already been forgotten again, interpretations that are partly borrowed second- and third-hand and moulded into an overall picture, views that subsequently penetrate into the higher journalism of our age and create the spiritual space—if one may say such a thing—in which we move.³⁹

Why is it that these two concepts—life and spirit—extracted from the observations of *Kulturphilosophie*, should be especially significant? Heidegger indicates that the almost mundane pervasiveness of the idea that there exists an opposition between the realms of life and spirit belies its philosophical importance. The idea, Heidegger says, is derived in its entirety from older concepts of a gulf between these two domains, and the corresponding notion that the human being is the embodiment of this gulf, consigned to an existence in which its 'spiritual' capacity is tied to a contingent living body. In this respect, Scheler's optimistic claim that the human being is 'in the epoch of a balance between life and spirit' is the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 70–1.

³⁸ Ibid. 71.

³⁹ Ibid.

culmination of an ancient idea that has been handed down and has undergone various mutations.⁴⁰ The idea of this division harks back to the ancient metaphysics contained in the organisation of Plato's Academy—to the antiquated splitting of *physis* from *ēthos*, of so-called natural beings from those associated with the human being and its activities.

Each interpretation, then, appears to announce something about the complex and discordant interrelation between these two domains. Does this imply that there is something about the contemporary situation that brings 'life' and 'spirit' to the fore? These terms have surely always been adopted in discussions concerning the status of the human and its relation to 'nature', so there cannot be anything extraordinary about their application in the contemporary situation. However, this latter observation, Heidegger says, is wrongheaded, because it is already treating these two terms 'as though they designated two components of man', two components 'that have always been ascribed to man and whose relation has always been one of conflict'.⁴¹ Such a presumption interprets these concepts and the relation between them in a way that is historically unencumbered and agnostic, as blanket terms that have already been grasped in a straightforward way. For Heidegger, life and spirit cannot be interpreted, as they are by Spengler et al., as properties of the human being, in the way that digestion or reproduction could be described as properties of an organism.⁴² Rather, the terms are 'concerned with specific fundamental orientations of man', ones that become more or less pronounced during specific phases in history, hence the particularly concentrated thematisation of these concepts in the work of Spengler et al.⁴³ For Heidegger, it cannot, therefore, be coincidental that the four stereotypical interpretations all reduce to an attempt to grasp and understand the meaning and implications of the contemporary relationship between life and spirit. The outcome of Heidegger's analysis is rather the idea that the contemporary age appears to engender a distinct awareness of the perennial metaphysical idea of a tension between the concepts of life and spirit.

What is it that enables renewed interest in this tension? Why is it that Spengler et al. all hit upon life and spirit as decisive concepts? Heidegger argues that the notion of a conflict between life and spirit, as presented in the four interpretations, is the exclusive result of a contemporary reading of Nietzsche. When we consider the terms life and spirit to represent a concern

⁴⁰ Ibid. 70.

⁴¹ Ibid. 71.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

with 'specific fundamental orientations of man', rather than properties of the structure of the human that can be determined theoretically, we see that the terms invoke 'what Nietzsche means by the terms *Dionysian* and *Apollonian*' respectively, where the Dionysian represents the creative and destructive chaos of life and the Apollonian the rational ordering that is couched by Spengler et al. in terms of spirit.⁴⁴ The 'source' of all the theorising in the four interpretations that Heidegger cites is, therefore, to be located in Nietzsche, or, rather, a 'particular reception of Nietzsche's philosophy'.⁴⁵ In order to grasp the 'pervasive fundamental trait' of the four interpretations, we must, therefore, begin by considering the dynamic of the Apollonian versus the Dionysian in Nietzsche, and the way in which this influences what Heidegger takes to be the 'higher journalism' of Spengler et al.

Heidegger examines the opposition between these concepts only very briefly, and only insofar as it motivates contemporary attempts to get to grips with the distinction between life and spirit. The opposition, Heidegger says, is an ancient one, and constitutes a major theme from the start of Nietzsche's philosophy.⁴⁶ On what grounds is Nietzsche's appropriation of the Dionysian/Apollonian opposition to be distinguished from the later speculations of Spengler, Klages, Scheler, and Ziegler concerning the life/spirit distinction? It is clear from the tone of Heidegger's abrupt turn to Nietzsche that Nietzsche's presence in his analysis exceeds the role of a progenitor of some reflections on life and spirit. Where the proponents of 'higher journalism' deal with these concepts theoretically, Nietzsche, Heidegger says, confronted them directly from within an active, living philosophising:

This opposition, taken from antiquity, inevitably revealed itself to the young classical philologist who wanted to break with his discipline. Yet he [...] knew that however much this opposition is maintained in his philosophising, it became transformed for him in and through this philosophising. Nietzsche himself knew: 'Only whoever transforms himself is related to me.'⁴⁷

In this brief engagement with Nietzsche we discover, once again, echoes of a Romantic sensibility in the conception of philosophising and the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., §18b), p. 72.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

philosopher that Heidegger presents in *FCM*. Through Nietzsche, Heidegger re-emphasises his lamentation, in the early passages of the lecture course, of the lacerations that modern metaphysics has wrought in human existence. Having placed itself at the mercy of the facultative divisions that have colonised and domesticated the unified Greek conception of the human, Heidegger describes the modern human as having wedded itself, in an almost masochistic attitude, to the very categories that divide it and disfigure it. In a discussion of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Humanity*, Charles Taylor remarks in a similar vein that, for the Romantics, the result of the modern preoccupation with drawing distinctions is that 'men have become so specialised' that, 'instead of expressing the whole, each is only a fragment [Bruchstück] of humanity'.⁴⁸ In recognising that these divisions must be replaced by an exuberant confrontation with the challenge of Presocratic culture—that is, in recognising that these ensnaring categories and distinctions are ones that we impose upon the primordial, more endangering, but all the more essential attitude to existence that was embodied in antiquity—Nietzsche places himself, according to Heidegger, at the centre of his own philosophical project; he 'lives' his philosophical enquiries and does so in the light of a sensitive suspicion of the corrosive life/spirit opposition.

Nietzsche thus comes on the scene, not as another cultural diagnostician, but as one who is engaged in a living philosophising, which means, for Heidegger, one who implicates himself directly in his philosophising, and one who is, therefore, ready to respond to the challenge of philosophy in all its dangerous ambiguity. By contrast, the analyses of Spengler et al. never get beyond the realm of 'worldview', because they only ever amount to a journalistic exchange of opinions; they 'diagnose' but do not think philosophically in the manner that Heidegger is attempting to facilitate in *FCM*. Cultural diagnosis, like all kinds of diagnosis, must presuppose a schema concerning the fundamental way in which the subject of the diagnosis is made manifest. When traced to its etymological root, the term 'diagnosis', from the Greek *dia-gignōskein*, designates a 'setting apart', a process of distinction-making that is based on a 'recognition', a 'thorough knowledge'. This attitude of prior certainty is clearly opposed to the attitude of attentive openness in the face of our essential 'homesickness', our precise absence of

⁴⁸ Taylor (1975: 28).

thorough diagnostic knowledge that Heidegger sees as a requisite of all philosophising.

In contrast to this diagnostic use of the concepts of life and spirit, the question of the Dionysian/Apollonian distinction is taken up by Nietzsche as one that he intends to experience directly rather than to ruminate on from a distance. Heidegger demonstrates this more deeply philosophical attitude by citing Nietzsche's radically autobiographical account of the Dionysian in *The Will to Power*. Having just described his disenchantment with philology, Nietzsche says the following: 'I understood that my instinct was heading in the opposite direction to that of Schopenhauer: toward a *justification of life*, even in its most frightful, most ambiguous, and most deceptive aspects:—for this I held the formula "Dionysian" in my hands.'⁴⁹ Heidegger then cites later aphorisms from the same work, in which Nietzsche indicates his understanding of the opposition: 'Apollo's illusion: the *eternity* of beautiful form; the aristocratic legislation "*thus it shall be always!*" Dionysus: sensuousness and cruelty. Transitoriness could be interpreted as enjoyment of productive and destructive energy, as *constant creation*.'⁵⁰

Regardless of their 'correctness', each of the cultural diagnosticians has already failed to get to grips with Nietzsche's thought insofar as none of them takes on the matter of this opposition as a problem that bears upon his existence directly.⁵¹ Ultimately, Heidegger says, 'none can be correct, insofar as they all mistake the essence of Nietzsche's philosophy'.⁵² The only claim that can be made at this stage is that

Nietzsche is the source of the interpretations we have mentioned. We are not saying this in order to accuse these interpretations of being derivative or to detract from their originality in any way, but in order to designate the direction from out of which an understanding is to be gained and to show where the place of the confrontation proper lies.⁵³

Despite their ability to articulate the idea that these concepts are caught up in a perennial interplay, Heidegger's four cultural diagnosticians do not 'confront' the original opposition behind the catchwords that they emphasise. From the inception of their analyses they envisage a split field of beings in which spirit and life are envisaged as identifiable categories that are separated out from one another. Nietzsche, by contrast, is described as one

⁴⁹ Cited in Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §18b), p. 72).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 73.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. 74.

who has managed to retrieve the original spirit of philosophising that Heidegger takes to be the motivation of Presocratic thought, which enjoyed a philosophical zenith before undergoing the Apollonian colonisation of Plato's Academy and the general systematisation and tempering of thought. Nietzsche has, according to Heidegger, managed to avoid being strait-jacketed by the divisions that have prevailed throughout history: *physis* versus *ēthos*, life versus spirit, and the human being versus nature.

The Genesis of the Human Being's Profound Boredom with Itself

Prima facie, the four examples that Heidegger takes from *Kulturphilosophie* do not appear to move the lecture course in any particular direction. This is because an ambivalence shrouds the emergence of the concepts of life and spirit, and the notion of an opposition between them. On the one hand, these concepts illuminate the common 'fundamental trait' of the contemporary situation. We are left with the impression that life and spirit are concepts that are implicit in the metaphysics of the contemporary age. And yet, on the other hand, Heidegger presents the analyses of the four authors he selects as somewhat mundane, perhaps even boring. However, it is precisely this 'boringness', this absence of anything stirring in their interpretations, that is of most significance to Heidegger. The 'whole approach' of cultural diagnostics is 'non-binding and is interesting for just this reason'—interesting because it does not force us in any particular direction, and interesting because this lack of any force itself demonstrates something peculiar about the efforts of the contemporary human to interpret himself.⁵⁴

In the absence of any possibility of capturing something essential about Dasein, the cultural diagnostician is free to speculate in bold tones about the fate of the contemporary human being. Speaking from an unoriginal, philosophically superficial perspective, Heidegger says that the approach nevertheless becomes 'even more exciting' when it moves from 'diagnosis' to 'prognosis'.⁵⁵ Cultural prognoses are seductive insofar as they reveal patterns that enable us to predict the future and produce comforting declarations concerning our 'condition'. However, these 'world-historical' diagnoses and prognoses, Heidegger says, 'do not involve us, they *do not attack us*. On the

⁵⁴ Ibid., §18c), p. 75.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

contrary, they release us from ourselves and present us to ourselves in a world-historical situation and role.⁵⁶ In other words, these attempts to ascertain our current and future situations do not force us to confront ourselves. Rather, by subscribing to them, we allow ourselves to become hostage to a set of conceptions regarding the predicament and destiny of humankind. The whole phenomenon of cultural diagnosis and prognosis is therefore 'sensational', which means, Heidegger says, that it develops out of an 'unconceded' 'illusory appeasement' (*scheinbare Beruhigung*)—that is, it implicitly absolves us of the task of confronting existence directly by inventing world-historical forces to which we hold ourselves captive.⁵⁷

Is it perhaps the case that this willingness to be held captive by a self-generated diagnostic exercise says more about the nature of the contemporary situation than the content of the diagnosis itself? This seems to be Heidegger's train of thought. Of necessity, he says, cultural diagnosis will have to bypass any opportunity to grasp the 'Da-sein' in the human being, insofar as it fails to recognise that its very attempt at diagnosis is itself part of that which needs to be interrogated.⁵⁸ Without having considered the essential structure of existence as such, it proceeds to predict its historical development by undergoing a 'setting-out [*Darstellung*] of human existence.⁵⁹

The irony of the situation, according to Heidegger, is that *Kulturphilosophie*, despite claiming to know about human existence, actually corrupts any possibility of grasping it 'essentially'.⁶⁰ For, in 'setting out' what the human being is, *Kulturphilosophie* treats it as a single item in an already ascertained taxonomy of beings. Heidegger claims that, unlike Nietzsche, Spengler et al. therefore miss the simple but crucial fact that 'when we ask about the essence of man we are asking about *ourselves*' and not about some other being in nature; we are trying to face who *we* are essentially.⁶¹ Though Spengler et al. theorise about the 'human condition', they do so as if the human being were a composite of properties, some life-like, some spirit-like, that is somehow detached from us as questioners. In seeking out this kind of scientific objectivity, they produce theories about the human that fail to engage us, that serve to 'untie us' from any confrontation with ourselves, and yet do so 'precisely as anthropology'.⁶² In other words, it is precisely in turning towards the human being as an object of study that

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., §18c), p. 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., §67, p. 281.

⁶² Ibid., §18c), p. 77.

Spengler et al. preclude the possibility of grasping anything essential about it.

With regards to the wider project of *FCM*, that of responding to Heidegger's challenge to us to begin philosophising for ourselves, what are we to make of this brief assessment of contemporary *Kulturphilosophie*? There are two important observations to be made. First, according to Heidegger, the boredom that compels us to seek out cultural diagnoses provides an important clue concerning the fundamental attunement that grips contemporary *Dasein*. Secondly, the content of these diagnoses concerning life and spirit, despite their derivative character and mundanity, contain shades of the more originary metaphysical picture that Heidegger traces in the *Preliminary Appraisal* and that he wishes to restore in *FCM* by awakening us to our contemporary fundamental attunement and its philosophical potential. Heidegger, therefore, has a specific use for this material. It is part of his philosophical restoration project, part of his attempt to bring about a philosophical confrontation with ourselves, a genuine 'living philosophising'.⁶³ Despite the vehemence of his critique of the cultural diagnosticians, Heidegger does wish to wrest something significant from them—namely, the idea that a pervasive boredom resounds throughout all of their accounts. Whether or not we consider Heidegger to be justified in distinguishing himself from Spengler et al., he does not consider himself to be following the path of cultural diagnosis. Instead, he wishes to position it on the rung of a ladder that eventually leads to metaphysics.

Heidegger suggests that, from within the deep boredom that grips the contemporary epoch, Spengler, Scheler, Klages, and Ziegler forecast out beyond this boredom, all the while knowing nothing of the mood's affective power. Chapter 2 described the way in which, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is the only being that 'speak[s] out of the whole and into it'.⁶⁴ In the spirit of this observation, Heidegger wishes to speak into, and not merely out of, the fundamental attunement that grips *Dasein*. He wishes to render explicit what he sees as implicit in the preoccupation he has identified with the life/spirit opposition. In so doing he elucidates the reason why such a struggle to appropriate this opposition, and its connection to Nietzsche, would occur in the contemporary age, an age characterised by a demand for new ways to conceptualise this struggle:

⁶³ Ibid., §15, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Ibid., §75, p. 353.

Have we become too *insignificant* to ourselves, that we require a role? Why do we find no meaning for ourselves any more, i.e., no essential possibility of being? Is it because an *indifference* yawns at us out of all things, an indifference whose grounds we do not know? Yet who can speak in such a way when world trade, technology, and the economy seize hold of man and keep him moving? And nevertheless *we seek a role for ourselves*. What is happening here?, we ask anew. Must we first make ourselves interesting again? Why *must* we do this? Perhaps because we have become *bored* with ourselves? Is man himself now supposed to have become bored with himself? Why so? *Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?*⁶⁵

The frenzied attempts to grasp the intractable opposition between life and spirit is, then, an indication of a pervasive and profound indifference towards ourselves. Why would it be the case that in a globalised epoch, in which we are capable of accessing new, sophisticated means for measuring the human being, of understanding all of its various components, and of collecting and disseminating information about it, we would need to battle with a languid indifference, a 'profound boredom' concerning human existence as such? Is there something antithetical here? Not according to Heidegger. We may know how to 'measure' the human, but this process of measuring does not disclose anything 'essential' about it. One may dismiss this as unfounded pessimism and assert that the contemporary age is one in which all aspects of human existence—biological, intellectual, social, political, and spiritual—are at our disposal. However, for Heidegger, this type of confidence is itself symptomatic of the fact that the human has become bored with itself and that this boredom is something that we deny because we '*do not want to know about*' it.⁶⁶

Though it seems that *FCM* has arrived at the threshold of this fundamental attunement of profound boredom somewhat abruptly, Heidegger will dedicate most of Part One of the lecture course to examining the phenomenological manifestation of this mood in order to justify his claim that boredom is *the* fundamental attunement of the contemporary epoch. The implication of this claim, as Chapter 4 will seek to show, is not that boredom is a wellspring of philosophical potentiality, and that if we can only

⁶⁵ Ibid., §18c, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Ibid., §19, p. 78.

tap into this attunement, we will be well on the way towards genuine metaphysics, and a proper engagement with who we are. Indeed, at first glance boredom appears to be an unlikely candidate for a metaphysical launch pad. The mood is surely soporific and tedious in a manner that corrupts rather than facilitates the activity of philosophising. It is indeed the case that boredom is stultifying, but Heidegger will argue that, if we endure rather than flee from this stultification, the clamour of our attempts to distract ourselves—our frenzied determination to subscribe to grand narratives concerning our condition and role in history—begins to subside. As this attachment to these prognostications lessens, a space is created, he thinks, for a genuine wakeful recognition of Dasein's being and its relation, via the activity of metaphysics, to *physis*.

4

A Journey through Boredom

The Dual Potentiality of Profound Boredom

In Heidegger's discussion of anxiety in *Being and Time*, the mood in which Dasein and its relation to world are disclosed as remote, obscure, and burdensome, he does not attempt to question the ways in which this mood may be contingent upon history. Boredom, on the other hand, emerges in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (FCM) within a discussion of a specific phase in the history of metaphysics. Evidence of a mood of deep indifference at the heart of the human's understanding of itself, which is embodied in the frenetic hypothesising of Spengler et al., comes to the fore when we turn our attention inward and question how things 'stand with us'.¹

Thus far in FCM, Heidegger has attempted, from an external perspective, to justify the idea that the fundamental attunement of contemporary Dasein is that of profound boredom. What follows is a lengthy examination of the 'internal' life of this mood, its phenomenological manifestations. The point of this phase of the lecture course is to lead us, via this 'ground-level' examination of boredom, to a deeper understanding of who we are, which also means to the threshold of metaphysics. This material is, I think, vital for grasping the subtleties and significance of Heidegger's reflections on the metaphysics of the human/animal distinction. I will therefore present it here in some detail.

Throughout Heidegger's analysis of this fundamental attunement, he argues that boredom contains two distinct possibilities. We know from his examination of *Kulturphilosophie* that one of these possibilities is that we wed ourselves to the territory of 'worldview', which is one direction in which the activity of metaphysics can be misunderstood. In pursuing this direction, Dasein seeks out diagnostic narratives to account for its existence and role in history. Another dimension of this first possibility, hinted at in Heidegger's

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: 18c), p. 76.

Preliminary Appraisal, is that Dasein occupies itself with science, another direction in which the true meaning of metaphysics is misconstrued. For Heidegger, science, like cultural diagnosis, begins from a position of 'thorough knowledge' and proceeds to make distinctions and predictions based on an epistemic schema that is already in place. Heidegger notes that he is referring to the original Greek concept of science as *episteme*, which means, Heidegger says, 'to stand before a matter, to know one's way around it'.² Both of these dimensions—science and worldview—amount to one possible response to the attunement of profound boredom.

It seems as if, by substituting philosophy with the fixed schemas of thought contained in science and worldview, we could anchor our enquiries and thereby ameliorate the insecurity that underpins the 'homesickness' at the essence of philosophising. However, Heidegger insists that the drama contained in the images of the human's position in the world that are drawn up in *Kulturphilosophie*, and the seductive sense of accuracy and organisation that belongs to the sciences, simply serve to cover over this primordial homesickness. Unlike philosophy, these avenues of enquiry '*do not attack us*' with the full force of a genuine confrontation with ourselves.³ Heidegger, therefore, wishes to use his analysis of profound boredom to explore a second possibility in which, rather than fighting it and trying to replace it with 'exciting' new ways of interpreting the human, we steady ourselves and begin to move in tandem with boredom, 'listening' to what this attunement tells us about our situation.⁴

In order to arrive at this second possibility, Heidegger takes us on a journey through boredom, a journey governed by the 'almost insane demand [*Zumutung*]' that we fully open ourselves to boredom.⁵ If we manage to endure this demand, he believes we discover something about our own contemporary metaphysics, and about ourselves as contemporary Dasein. This journey also begins to unveil something of the three titular fundamental concepts of metaphysics: world, finitude, and solitude. The 'forms' of boredom that Heidegger traces each correspond to one of these concepts, reinforcing our understanding of their conspicuousness in the contemporary epoch.

Heidegger hopes, by the end of Part One of the lecture course, to have justified the idea that profound boredom is *our* fundamental attunement, that it infiltrates the way in which we encounter beings qua contemporary

² Ibid., §9, p. 32.

³ Ibid., §18c), p. 75.

⁴ Ibid., §31a), p. 139.

⁵ Ibid., §19, p. 79.

Dasein. Insofar as this mood brings to light the three metaphysical contexts of world, finitude, and solitude, these are likewise *our* contexts. They are ideas that pertain to us directly, and, once we have recognised and taken ownership of them, we can set our understanding of them in motion and finally begin to do metaphysics for ourselves, which means, by extension, that we will come closer to an understanding of who we are.

The Three Forms of Boredom

What kind of mood is Heidegger referring to when he speaks of boredom? The German term, *Langeweile*, designates boredom as a state in which time ‘becomes drawn out, becomes long’.⁶ We tend to avoid boredom by means of our efforts to ‘pass the time’, to make time appear short and thus desirable once more, by pursuing different activities.⁷ Do we thereby expunge our lives of boredom? No, it is a constant threat, however ingeniously we try to pass the time that it intercepts. Rather than ‘annihilating’ boredom, Heidegger claims that we simply ‘cause it to *fall asleep*'.⁸ For the most part, we ‘do not wish to let it be awake—it, this boredom which, in the end, is already awake’, and with its ‘gaze’ ‘already penetrates us and attunes us through and through’.⁹ From this brief consideration of the basic structure of boredom, Heidegger infers that there is no need to postulate or ‘invent’ boredom as a possible attunement, nor to force boredom to ‘awaken’.¹⁰ Instead, he claims that the task we face is that of ‘*letting it be awake, guarding against it falling asleep*’.¹¹ Keeping boredom from sleep will not be easy; it is a ‘strange’, even ‘insane’, request, an imposition.¹² The strangeness of this imposition stems from its insistence that we overthrow our habitual tendency to eliminate boredom by passing the time. What would it mean to make ourselves vulnerable to boredom on purpose, to sit with boredom in a way that allows us to examine it while being bored?

The object of Heidegger’s investigation is to navigate this difficulty in order to understand how boredom behaves as a fundamental attunement, as a means of disclosing beings that also discloses something essential about our own being.¹³ The aim is thus to examine *our* boredom, to test out the idea that we exist in the clutches of profound boredom. Heidegger argues that we can achieve this only by removing the indeterminacy and obscurity

⁶ Ibid. 78.

⁷ Ibid. 79.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., §16a), pp. 59–60.

¹¹ Ibid., §19, p. 79.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., §20, p. 82.

of boredom. We should avoid descriptions of boredom as a psychological phenomenon and simply consider the various ways in which we are bored. Heidegger therefore begins by analysing the most conspicuous, recognisable form of boredom, and then moves on to consider less conspicuous but increasingly deep manifestations of the mood.

Each of the types of boredom that Heidegger analyses discloses one of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics. As the stages of boredom increase in profundity, Heidegger aims to justify his claim that world, finitude, and individuation are *the three fundamental concepts* that circumscribe and determine the kind of being that Dasein is. It is at this metaphysical level of enquiry, and not at the level of punchy 'journalistic' appraisals concerning the human being as a mediator between life and spirit, that we approach the threshold of metaphysics and thereby begin to understand who we are.

The following scenarios are thus used by Heidegger as illustrations to help us grasp contemporary Dasein's three fundamental concepts of metaphysics. The first 'form' of boredom, 'becoming bored by something', connects us to the first of these concepts: world.¹⁴ From within the clutches of this most familiar version of the mood, the worldly entities that surround us become boring; the world is experienced as boring. The second form of boredom, 'becoming bored with something', reveals the second fundamental concept of metaphysics: individuation.¹⁵ This breed of boredom is one in which we ourselves are the source of our boredom. It therefore exposes the burdensome conspicuousness and 'solitude' of our own individual Dasein. Finally, the third form of boredom, 'it is boring for one', illuminates the third fundamental concept: finitude. Heidegger claims that it is in those moments in which 'it is boring', not for this or that person but for a general 'undifferentiated no one', that Dasein glimpses its radical temporality, its status as a transitory opening onto existence.¹⁶

Boredom will not spontaneously produce a deep knowledge of world, finitude, and individuation. The demand contained in *FCM* is that we reach this point for ourselves, that we recognise and pursue the 'second possibility' of profound boredom by developing a philosophical relationship to this attunement rather than fleeing from it into the palliative arms of worldview or science. If we give ourselves over to the dynamic of boredom, we will discover that the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics remain

¹⁴ Ibid., §23, p. 92.

¹⁵ Ibid., §24b) p. 109.

¹⁶ Ibid., §30, p. 135.

dormant in our epoch. We will be reminded that these concepts have not disappeared; they still represent essential landmarks in our enquiry into metaphysics and human existence, each revealing something essential about who we are, our exceptional connection to *physis*, and the activity of metaphysics.

(i) Becoming Bored by Something: World

Heidegger begins with the most 'basic' form of boredom: 'becoming bored by something', the form in which worldly entities show up as boring. While waiting at a deserted country railway station, we go to all possible lengths to 'pass the time': we read the timetables, wander up and down the platform, or continually check our watch. In so doing, we attempt to 'drive away' the boredom that '*drives time on*'.¹⁷ We are aiming to drive away the period of waiting. However, waiting, which involves suspense rather than listlessness, is not equivalent to boredom.¹⁸ In boredom we do not experience time, or the dragging of time as an identifiable property. We cannot infer that, after four hours of some boring activity, we will become bored, because we may become bored during a five-minute conversation, or at a party that lasts eight hours. Our use of units of measurement such as minutes and hours as a means of 'entrapping' time gives the illusion that time is 'unwavering', when in fact, considered phenomenologically, time is 'temperamental', prone to expansions and contractions.¹⁹ Heidegger claims that, rather than calculating the progression of time as a measure for boredom, we need to consider the manner in which, in boredom, time becomes '*too slow for us*', and the ways in which we 'fight *against*' this apparent slowing of time.²⁰ What we are attempting to combat is the fact that, in this dragging of time, boredom '*holds us in limbo*'. We fight this peculiar vacillating and dragging of time' that becomes 'burdensome' for us.²¹

Passing the time, then, amounts to '*wanting to overcome the vacillation of time*' and the 'paralysing' effect this has.²² Though we are always at the mercy of time, to the extent that we are always 'in' time, boredom enacts a '*peculiar impressing [Andrägen] of the power of that time* to which we are bound'.²³ In other words, boredom underscores the 'temporalising' character of time, and the manner in which this temporalisation determines all our

¹⁷ Ibid., §23a), p. 95.

²⁰ Ibid. 97.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

²¹ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., §23b), pp. 97–8.

²² Ibid. 98.

²³ Ibid.

activities.²⁴ How and why does this dragging 'oppress' us? Oppression implies a stifling closeness, and yet that which drags is surely 'held back' and hence 'distant', not 'before us' and therefore not oppressive.²⁵ This being held back and yet, at the same time, remaining oppressively close is captured in Heidegger's claim that, in boredom, time 'holds us in limbo'.²⁶ Though this 'holding in limbo' provides us with some leeway, Heidegger claims that the 'slowness' of time restricts us nonetheless.²⁷ 'Slowness' lingers in boring moments but disappears as soon as we are actively engaged with some activity.²⁸

When we scan the train timetables or wander up and down the platform during our wait, we are not seriously interested in these activities. We do them to hold off a second feature of boredom: the manner in which, in boredom, we are 'left empty'.²⁹ The failure of entities to engage us in the railway station scenario is precisely what renders them boring. These entities 'leave us in peace, do not disturb us [...] They *abandon us to ourselves*'.³⁰ However, despite this abandonment, we remain trapped by them. Heidegger claims that, though we are granted some flexibility concerning how we pass the time, we are still at the beck and call of this situation, at once 'held in limbo' and 'left empty' by it.³¹

In Heidegger's description of this first form of boredom, the attempts that we make to pass the time while being stranded at the railway station amount to attempts to make the world interesting again. We are bored by our circumstances, and the entities that bear down on us, offering us no possibility of relief, also appear boring. 'World' has become conspicuous in its boringness—world understood, Harman says, as 'a system of interrelated things whose emptiness holds us in limbo'.³² The apparently superficial struggle that this version of boredom contains belies a deeper metaphysical significance. It has opened up a provisional enquiry into the first of the three perennial themes of metaphysics.

(ii) Becoming Bored with Something: Individuation

In the first form of boredom, entities '*abandon us to ourselves*'.³³ The world offers nothing of interest. It is almost as though the world simply holds a

²⁴ Ibid., §23c), p. 99.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 100.

²⁹ Ibid., §23d), p. 101.

³⁰ Ibid. 103.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Harman (2007: 86).

³³ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §23d), p. 103).

mirror before us, leaving us with nothing but our own reflection. What does being left ‘undisturbed’ to our own devices mean for the sense of emptiness that characterises boredom? Rather than being eliminated, Heidegger claims that we ourselves become the object of this emptiness.³⁴ The second form of boredom marks this shift from the concept of a desolation pertaining to beings as a whole—that is, to world—to a desolation pertaining to Dasein itself as this being in the midst of beings. By highlighting this conspicuousness of Dasein’s own sense of itself, this version of boredom illuminates the second of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics: individuation.

Heidegger uses another example to illustrate this second form. We are invited to a friend’s dinner party, and, though our presence is not obligatory, we go because we have nothing else planned; we have time to go. The evening, as expected, is one of pleasant conversation, the tone of which is amusing and mellow. The evening soon passes, and we find ourselves back at home. There was nothing obviously boring about this evening, and yet, Heidegger says, we ‘cast a quick glance at the work we interrupted [...] make a rough assessment of things and look ahead to the next day—and then it comes: I was bored after all this evening’.³⁵ Can this boredom be understood, as in the first scenario, in terms of the attempt of the bored individual to pass the time? Presumably not, since we were not engaged in such an attempt during the evening. Rather than a straightforward absence of passing the time, Heidegger describes a kind of ‘transformation’ in the way in which time is passed.³⁶ Instead of engaging in diversionary activities during the evening, the evening itself, taken as a whole, is an attempt to pass the time.³⁷ It is this very passing the time, this very attempt to occupy ourselves, that bores us.

A distinction thus emerges between the first and second forms of boredom. In the first case, Heidegger says, we are able to identify a ‘determinate boring thing’.³⁸ In the second case, we have ‘something indeterminate that bores us’; time does not appear to drag, we do not feel oppressed, and yet we are bored.³⁹ What is boring here is ‘that “I know not what”, that unknown in the whole situation in response to which the evening itself—which comprises the situation—is organised’.⁴⁰ This latter case is peculiar, because nothing obvious appears to hold us in limbo, and any emptiness is filled by the evening, so it is unclear what we are ‘left empty’ by. The example indicates an ‘expansion’ and an ‘inconspicuousness’ of passing the time, since

³⁴ Ibid., §24b), p. 109.

³⁸ Ibid., §25a), p. 114.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. 111.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 115.

³⁷ Ibid. 112.

passing the time is not a spontaneous diversionary tactic but constitutes the evening as a whole.⁴¹ As such, the evening is inconspicuous in its non-boringness and 'casualness'.⁴² Just as the surrounding beings at the railway station leave us empty by being at hand without engaging us, the dinner party leaves us empty on account of its effortlessness. Nothing about it confronts us; we go along with the pleasantries without agitation. However, Heidegger claims that precisely this absence of agitation is a sign of a more fundamental problem—that is, a more disturbing and more profound kind of being left empty:

[I]n this casualness we abandon ourselves [*uns überlassen*] to our being there alongside and part of things [...] Being left empty does not now first ensue in and through the absence of fullness, the refusal of this or that being, rather it *grows from the depths*, because its own precondition, namely seeking to be satisfied by beings, is already obstructed in such casualness [...] Here too what bores us has the character of leaving us empty, but of a leaving empty that attacks more profoundly; it is a preventing of that seeking, and the diffusion of casualness.⁴³

Heidegger claims that, because we do not drive this boredom away, we (albeit indirectly and non-intentionally) allow it to 'be there [da-sein]' as what it is.⁴⁴ The casualness with which we participate in the dinner party conceals a deeper kind of being left empty, which stems from the fact that we are 'seeking nothing further' from the situation, a situation that appears full and satisfying.⁴⁵ In this casualness we abandon ourselves to the situation, and, in so doing, '[leave] ourselves behind'.⁴⁶ This constitutes a deeper breed of emptiness than that associated with becoming bored by..., which, Heidegger says, 'consisted merely in the absence of fullness'.⁴⁷ In the second form of boredom, time does not drag; we 'have' time, hence our decision to attend the party. And yet this very having of time, the very fact that time temporarily 'releases' us and allows us to pursue activities of our own choosing, is even more pronounced evidence of our being fundamentally bound to time. This being bound, and yet temporarily granted time for ourselves during the dinner party, only to be bound once more, epitomises the second structural moment of being held in limbo. The time that we 'leave' ourselves reveals itself not as a steady flowing or as an unbearable

⁴¹ Ibid., §25b), p. 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 118.

⁴² Ibid., §25a), p. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 119.

⁴³ Ibid., §25b), p. 117.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 120.

oppression, but as something that has come to a standstill. This ‘standing of time’, Heidegger says, is ‘a *more originary holding in limbo*, which is to say, *oppressing*’.⁴⁸

Finding ourselves in this suspension of time, we unhinge ourselves from our past and future. By participating in the dinner party, we give ourselves over to this standing of time, and in so doing we ‘bring time to a stand’, to an extended ‘now’ rather than a series of moments, and this standing of time holds us in limbo.⁴⁹ Heidegger claims that *Dasein* itself is directly implicated in the dynamic of this second form: whereas, in the first scenario, ‘what is boring comes from outside, as it were’—that is, comes directly from the ‘world’—in the second scenario that which is boring ‘arises from out of *Dasein* itself’.⁵⁰ *Dasein* becomes acutely aware of itself as this being that freely chose to go to the dinner party, to subject itself to this suspension in time. *Dasein* thus experiences, in and through this self-infliction, the irreducibility of itself, its individuation, which cannot be set aside or dispersed into the sociable atmosphere of the dinner party. As Harman says, the boring thing in this scenario ‘is not world’ in the sense of a field of entities that go to make up a situation, but rather ‘the *solitude* of your *Dasein*’.⁵¹ The increased profundity of this second form is evident here, insofar as it ties into Heidegger’s guiding thesis that the contemporary human has become bored with *itself*. The dinner party is a microcosm of a far more pervasive situation in which one pretends to be interested without being gripped, an attitude that spawns the ‘higher journalism’ of cultural diagnosis described in the Chapter 3.

(iii) Profound Boredom

(a) The Profundity of Profound Boredom: The ‘Telling Refusal’ of Beings

The deepening of the third, final form of boredom is due to the way in which it turns on the structure of *Dasein*, rather than occupying itself with external entities or situations. Heidegger describes profound boredom as a joining-together and deepening of the first two forms. It is not simply the world, or our self, that is experienced as boring, but rather both of these taken together in such a way that the peculiar interrelation between *Dasein* and world is

⁴⁸ Ibid., §25c), p. 122.

⁴⁹ Ibid., §26, p. 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §27, p. 128.

⁵¹ Harman (2007: 87).

revealed. This revelation is exposed, Heidegger argues, within scenarios in which '*it is boring for one*'.⁵² This 'one' is intended to invoke the concept not of the self as an individual ego set against the objective world but as rather an 'undifferentiated no one'.⁵³

Heidegger claims that this third form of boredom is difficult to exemplify.⁵⁴ It is not tied to any concrete scenario, and it is, therefore, unclear how it could possibly constitute a version of 'passing the time'. However, the elusive nature of this boredom, and the subsequent 'powerlessness' of all attempts to counteract it, provide the most decisive clue for clarifying its structure.⁵⁵ For this powerlessness is a sign that the attunement

has already *transformed Dasein* in such a way that in our being transformed we also understand that not only would it be hopeless to want to struggle against this attunement with some form of passing the time, but that it would almost be something presumptuous to close ourselves off from what this attunement wishes to tell us.⁵⁶

The upshot here is that this third form affects us in a far deeper way than the first and the second, since 'no longer [to] permit any passing the time means to let boredom be overpowering'.⁵⁷ The fact that we are unable to redirect or hold off this boredom means that it is indifferent to our efforts. It is a *fundamental* attunement—that is, one that is capable of '*manifesting how things stand concerning us*'.⁵⁸ It exposes our basic drive towards the disclosure of entities, as well as revealing something of the entities that we are driven to disclose. Insofar as we cannot deny or delay this boredom, Heidegger claims that we are '*compelled to listen* [...] in the sense of that kind of compelling force which everything *properly authentic* about *Dasein* possesses, and which accordingly is related to *Dasein's innermost freedom*'.⁵⁹

Only by submitting to the force of profound boredom do we stand a chance of glimpsing this freedom and of understanding that it is a boredom that we cannot simply overcome. For all their busyness, *Kulturphilosophie* and scientific research do not alleviate profound boredom, but merely paint

⁵² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §30, p. 134).

⁵³ Ibid. 135. This idea is notably close to Heidegger's characterisation of *das Man* in *Being and Time*, where he describes the homogenous 'they' to which *Dasein* succumbs as follows: 'The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*man selbst*], not some people [*einige*], and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "they" [*das Man*] (ibid., §27, 164).

⁵⁴ Ibid. §30, 135.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 135–6.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 136.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

over it using bold patterns. Heidegger argues that the appeal of the projection and rigour contained within these disciplines has whipped contemporary Dasein into a vortex of activity in which it has long forgotten the genuinely philosophical origins from which these disciplines derive their significance. Heidegger's hope, at this stage, is that we now know enough about this attunement to recognise that this frantic response to boredom is not really a response at all; it is merely a distraction, a misunderstanding of what is entailed in genuine questioning. The attempt of these disciplines to make the human interesting presupposes that it is the type of being who needs to be made interesting, that it is not already interesting, or that we have lost interest in it. Such attempts are the unwitting by-products of the emptiness of profound boredom.⁶⁰

This emptiness is neither the 'absence of fullness' nor the self-inflicted emptiness that characterises the second form of boredom. Chasing away this more thorough kind of desolation is not an option, as it was in the first two scenarios. It is an emptiness felt both in relation to the world, and in relation to ourselves. Heidegger claims that, through it, we experience directly the solitude into which every Dasein is thrown, circumstances in which, 'as this person in each case, we want nothing from the particular beings in the contingent situation as these very beings'.⁶¹ The result is that a languid indifference occupies the space in which we would otherwise develop a conception of ourselves, our self-worth, and of beings as a whole—that is, the world.⁶² In this form of boredom, Heidegger says, 'everything' is disclosed in such a way that it is 'of equally great and equally little worth': 'This boredom *takes us precisely back to the point* where we do not in the first place seek out this or that being for ourselves in this particular situation; it takes us back to the point where all and everything appears indifferent to us'.⁶³ We ourselves belong to this totality that is now manifested as something boring and indifferent: 'what is individual about us ourselves and familiar to us' is part of what 'recedes' in profound boredom.⁶⁴ The version of 'being left empty' that we see in this third version of the mood consists in Dasein subjecting itself to beings' 'telling refusal of themselves as a whole'.⁶⁵ In this 'refusal', Dasein finds itself somehow 'left entirely in the lurch, not only not occupied with this or that being, not only left standing by [itself] in this or that respect, but as a whole'.⁶⁶ In other words, the entire structure of

⁶⁰ Ibid., §31a), p. 137.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 139.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 139–40.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 138.

existence, the entire situatedness of Dasein within the world, becomes conspicuous in its tenuousness.

Heidegger thus begins to clarify the manner in which the nexus between Dasein and world manifests itself in profound boredom. Profound boredom exposes Dasein's embeddedness in the midst of beings as a whole—that is, the world—by revealing this connection in all its insecurity. Dasein's position in relation to world and fundamental drive towards the unconcealment of beings is disclosed insofar as, in moments of profound boredom, these beings are refused:

[T]hrough this boredom Dasein finds itself set in place precisely before beings as a whole, to the extent that in this boredom the beings that surround us offer us no further possibility of acting and no further possibility of our doing anything. There is a telling refusal on the part of beings as a whole with respect to these possibilities.⁶⁷

This tension between Dasein and world is brought out in the phrase 'telling refusal', McNeill and Walker's translation of the German *Versagen*. This noun contains *sagen*, saying or telling, what Heidegger describes as 'making manifest'.⁶⁸ Hence *ver-sagen* is understood literally as 'mis-telling', a failure in 'making manifest'. What, precisely, is concealed in this refusal—that is, what is *gesagt* in this *Versagen*? Nothing less, Heidegger says, than the 'very possibilities' of Dasein's 'doing and acting'.⁶⁹ The telling refusal is *especially* telling in this way, because such a refusal on the part of beings presupposes their initial tendency towards articulation, towards unconcealment. Coextensively, this refusal illuminates the inclination of all beings in *physis* to conceal themselves—that is, the drive towards articulation that is manifested, first and foremost, as self-concealment. The refusal of beings as a whole therefore exposes Dasein's essential capacity for and drive towards unconcealment; it makes this possibility known by refusing it. It also reveals the ambiguous self-refusal of beings that presupposes the possibility of their unconcealment and the manner in which beings become all the more conspicuous in this refusal: 'This telling refusal does not speak about them, does not lead directly to dealings with them, but in its telling refusal it *points to them* and makes them known in refusing them.'⁷⁰ This idea thus transports us back to the opening of *FCM*, where Heidegger describes the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁸ Ibid., §31b), p. 140.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

ancient schema that prefaces the history of metaphysics, in which the figure of the human being is envisaged as a peculiar schism in the field of *physis*, an opening in nature enabled by the human's extraordinary capacity freely to 'speak out' about beings, disclosing them as what they are. This very idea is implicit in the refusal of beings that is now described as characteristic of profound boredom. Only if there is such a possibility of freely speaking out about beings—only if beings seek out articulation in the first instance—can there be an inhibition of this possibility. Precisely within this inhibition, the original possibility itself is revealed.

Heidegger's suggestion is that knowledge of this capacity to 'speak out' is implicit in profound boredom, and it is up to us as prospective metaphysicians to render it explicit. Boredom appears to inhibit Dasein's initial capacity for speaking out about beings by blunting the ease and acuity with which Dasein discloses beings. If Dasein simply ignores this blunting affect, ignores the manner in which beings refuse themselves, it can continue to make utterances about beings. However, these utterances will be superficial and 'non-binding'.⁷¹ Heidegger claims that alternatively, if Dasein is willing to pay attention, it will be capable of glimpsing this original capacity for speaking out.⁷² The very realisation of a *telling* refusal, a refusal *in telling* but also a refusal *that tells*, thus reveals a deeper possibility that edges us towards the threshold of metaphysics.

The route towards metaphysics from this realisation is not an easy one. The observation that 'telling refusal' implies an initial capacity for telling does not mean that, from within our deep torpor—the slack indifference that hangs over entities and the sense of emptiness in which we experience our solitude in relation to them—we will be able to reach this realisation of our distinct possibilities. On the contrary, Heidegger claims that we face a 'peculiar impoverishment which sets in with respect to ourselves in this "it is boring for one"', which 'first *brings* the *self* in all its nakedness *to itself* as the *self* that *is there* and has taken over the being-there of its *Da-sein*'.⁷³ In profound boredom's 'telling refusal', beings as a whole are disclosed to Dasein, but Dasein is not able to engage directly with them. As is the case with anxiety, this attunement leaves Dasein suspended in this disclosure without prescribing any particular action. Dasein glimpses the abyssal character of its bare existence, but without any means of managing it—that is, of bringing it back to the level of everyday dealings with things.

⁷¹ Ibid., §18c), p. 75.

⁷² Ibid., §31b), p. 140.

⁷³ Ibid., §31b), p. 143.

Dasein discovers itself in the midst of beings, and yet it 'can no longer bring itself to expect anything from beings as a whole in any respect, because there is not even anything enticing about beings any more'.⁷⁴ This absence of any 'enticement' is the result of Dasein's inability to 'go along with' beings, and this inability is due to the fact that the temporal horizon, which 'holds beings as a whole open and makes them accessible in general', also 'simultaneously [binds] Dasein to itself' and 'entrances' it.⁷⁵ The inertia that floods through the manifestation of beings in profound boredom thus also pervades Dasein, because Dasein finds itself in the midst of these beings as one among them. Dasein is entranced (*bannen*) by the temporal horizon, and this entrance-ment corrupts any attempt at 'going along with' beings.⁷⁶ Though it is what first makes possible *any* accessibility of beings, in boredom the temporal horizon itself holds Dasein captive, transfixing it in such a way that beings no longer manifest themselves as wholly accessible:

This attunement in which Dasein is everywhere and yet may be nowhere has its own peculiar feature of entrancement. *What entrances* is nothing other than the *temporal horizon*. Time entrances [*bannt*] Dasein, not as the time which has remained standing as distinct from flowing, but rather the *time beyond such flowing and its standing*, the time which in each case *Dasein itself as a whole* is [...] Entranced by time, Dasein cannot find its way to those beings that *announce* themselves in the *telling refusal of themselves* as a whole precisely within this horizon of entrancing time.⁷⁷

We thus have an explanation for the 'impoverishment' that is found at the heart of this attunement, and for the difficulty of our task of moving in and through this attunement towards metaphysics. The temptation in the face of such a scenario is to withdraw from it by retreating into other disciplines. However, according to Heidegger, there is much to be gained from sticking with our new awareness of this boredom and enduring it.

Heidegger argues that, if we can bear to remain open to the seemingly paralysing effects of this mood, it will bring us to the brink of an extremity (*Spitze*), in which, through an awareness of a telling refusal, the temporal

⁷⁴ Ibid., §32a), p. 147.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Note that this description provides further evidence that Heidegger is revising his analysis of attunement in *Being and Time* by providing a more detailed account of the precise way in which beings withdraw in fundamental attunements, revealing the bare structure of Dasein.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

nature of our possibilities is exposed and we are ‘*impelled toward the originary making-possible of Dasein as such*’.⁷⁸ The telling refusal of beings as a whole reveals the ‘expanse’ of beings, insofar as it envelops all beings, as well as the ‘extremity’ of our own situatedness in the midst of these beings, the extremity that is required to apprehend these beings as a whole while being one among them.⁷⁹

(b) Profound Boredom and Finitude: The Moment of Vision

Within profound boredom, the unity of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics is revealed. World and individuation attain a weighty conspicuousness in the first two forms of boredom, but not yet in an especially disturbing manner. It does not seem to be relevant or questionable, at these more superficial levels of boredom, how it is that we ourselves are tied to the entities that bore us; we are not compelled to confront the connection between world and individuation. In *profound* boredom, by contrast, we are struck by precisely this connection, by the extremity of Dasein’s relation to world, a relation that has a singularly shattering trait: finitude.

There are two dimensions of the relation between profound boredom and finitude. The first concerns the way in which boredom subjects Dasein to the extreme temporality of its existence—that is, the fact that it is a finite being and therefore at the mercy of time. When Heidegger claims that, in profound boredom, all beings ‘withdraw’, this does not imply that here, in the present moment of boredom, all beings are refused.⁸⁰ Rather, his claim is that all past, present, and prospective beings simultaneously withdraw.⁸¹ These three perspectives cannot be split off from one another and measured using clock time, because they are ‘originarily’ ‘united in the horizon of time as such’; they make up the ‘*single and unitary universal horizon of time*’ that ‘entrances’ Dasein in profound boredom.⁸² This form of boredom, then, confronts Dasein with its primordial relation to time—that is, its finitude. As Harman says, in profound boredom we ‘manage to make contact with something essential: namely, we are explicitly confronted with our own Dasein, its possibilities, and our thrownness into the world. We are entranced by time, unable to escape it’.⁸³ This form of boredom conveys to Dasein its essential finitude by ‘[confronting] us with the total situation of our Dasein in the world’.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Ibid., §31b), p. 144.

⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸³ Harman (2007: 88).

⁸⁰ Ibid., §32a), p. 145.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Despite its efforts, in this entrancement Dasein struggles to re-establish its originary mode of engagement with beings. It thus has no other option than to 'leave this concealed entrancement its power'.⁸⁵ Though this situation appears desperate, it has the potential to bring Dasein face to face with its temporality, which means, ultimately, its finitude, its essence. Dasein's finitude is what is 'told' in the 'telling refusal' of beings as a whole, since it is Dasein's boundedness to time that enables the self-refusal of beings—that is, the ability of beings to '[hold] before Dasein as it were, as unexploited, the possibilities of its doing and acting in the midst of these beings'.⁸⁶ However, time, as that which holds Dasein captive in this entrancement, also 'announces' itself as the source of Dasein's potentiality for freedom.⁸⁷

Because the entrancement contained in the depths of this attunement exposes the possibility of freedom, but does not prescribe means for enacting it, the onus is on Dasein to free itself. However, this 'self-liberation', Heidegger says, is possible only if Dasein '*resolutely discloses* [sich entschließt] itself *to itself*, i.e., discloses itself [sich erschließt] for itself as Da-sein'.⁸⁸ This amounts to a decision by Dasein to endure the 'extremity' of its own finite existence, its simultaneous openness to and slavishness to the horizon of time, which marshals all possible accessibility of beings.

Heidegger argues that this endurance of Dasein's essential extremity, of the way in which time temporalises its existence through and through, is itself illustrated in an 'instant' of time, a 'moment of vision' (*Augenblick*). This moment of vision is to be understood not as a period of measurable time, but rather as an exercise in which the being-there of Dasein is revealed to Dasein.⁸⁹ The 'present' that it designates is Dasein's becoming present to its own extremity, which is achieved when Dasein 'brings itself before itself' as an opening onto beings as a whole.⁹⁰ Thus, Beistegui says, 'the Moment is not linked to the disclosure of a particular situation but to the disclosure of situatedness as such'.⁹¹ As a temporal phenomenon, boredom presents a special opportunity for resolutely disclosing the structure of Dasein's temporality. From within this attunement, Dasein is especially susceptible to being '*impelled into the extremity of that which properly makes possible*'—that is, being '*impelled through entrancing time into that time itself*', into its proper essence'.⁹²

⁸⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §32a), p. 147.

⁸⁶ Ibid., §32b), p. 148.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §68a), p. 388).

⁹⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §38b), p. 165).

⁹¹ Miguel de Beistegui, 'Homo Prudens', in Raffoul and Pettigrew (2002: 124).

⁹² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §32b), p. 149).

The second dimension of the relation between profound boredom and finitude is more complex. It concerns the exercise through which Dasein makes the move from entranced boredom to the moment of vision. Heidegger describes the process of the moment of vision, in which Dasein grasps the essence of time as a ‘horizon of ecstases’, as a kind of ‘rupture’ (*Gebrochenheit*). This rupture, which directs Dasein towards time as the site of its own radical possibilities, is facilitated in a unique way in profound boredom: ‘Entranced in the *expanses of the temporal horizon* and yet thereby *impelled into the extremity of the moment of vision* as that which properly makes possible, that which can announce itself as such only if it imposes itself compellingly as something possible—this is what occurs in such boredom.’⁹³

This rupturing moment of vision is ‘announced’ in the telling refusal of beings in which beings as a whole—that is, ‘world’—is refused. As well as rendering explicit this concept of ‘world’, the telling refusal highlights Dasein’s individuation, its status as ‘a Da-sein that in each case is as existing in the situation it has unreservedly seized upon, an existing which is always singular and unique’.⁹⁴ ‘World’ and ‘individuation’, Heidegger argues, form an ‘original unity’, a ‘structural link’ that ‘manifests itself precisely in the fundamental attunement of profound boredom’.⁹⁵ Insofar as this unity always relates back to Dasein’s own finite thrownness into the world, it is parasitic upon the concept of finitude. Finitude is thus revealed in profound boredom as a kind of medium through which world and individuation take shape. World is not refused in an isolated moment; rather *all* worldly beings, past, present, and future, withdraw. Likewise, Dasein experiences its individuation not as an isolated, abstract ego, but rather as this particular ‘Da-sein’ on its own singular trajectory, as a ‘unique’ stretching within time.⁹⁶ Taken together, these concepts demonstrate the conspicuousness of the finite, temporal character of existence.

Profound boredom thus brings Dasein to the brink of a realisation of its finite character, and the moment of vision constitutes the direct realisation of this character. The rupturing that occurs in the moment of vision, which is the second dimension of the relation between profound boredom and the fundamental concept of finitude, brings the finitude of Dasein to a moment of realisation. This rupturing occurs within the structure of Dasein itself:

⁹³ Ibid. 151.

⁹⁴ Ibid., §39, p. 169.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Is the essence of the unity and the structural linking of both terms [world and individuation] ultimately a *rupture*? What is the meaning of this *rupture within Dasein itself*? We call this the finitude of Dasein and ask: *What does finitude mean?* Only with this question have we attained the question that fully gains a purchase upon what it is that is trying to voice itself in that fundamental attunement. *Is it not the finitude of Dasein that resonates in the fundamental attunement of profound boredom and attunes us through and through?*⁹⁷

Though finitude is the source of this rupture, and though world and individuation are already disclosed within profound boredom, the moment of vision facilitates a direct confrontation with these concepts in their deepest forms.

At the start of the lecture course, Heidegger says, the decision to question world, finitude, and solitude appeared 'violent' and 'arbitrary'. It is now possible, he claims, fully to elucidate the role that these concepts are playing. They are not philosophical themes that have been selected at random from books, but are significant because they emerge from the fundamental attunement of profound boredom.⁹⁸ The '*elaboration of these questions*', Heidegger says, 'is nothing other than an *accentuation of the possibility of that fundamental attunement*'.⁹⁹ Insofar as this attunement is grounded in the threefold ecstatic temporality of Dasein, these three questions will also be grounded in this temporality. To this extent, world, finitude, and solitude are fundamental concepts of Dasein, ones that gradually become more explicit throughout the analysis of the three forms of boredom.

World, Finitude, and Individuation: Three Perennial Metaphysical Concepts

At the close of Part One of *FCM* we are left with world, finitude, and individuation, three perennial metaphysical contexts, and three fundamental concepts of Dasein. We are also left with the 'burdensome' knowledge that Heidegger wishes us to accrue so that we can begin philosophising for ourselves—that is, knowledge of Dasein as a finite linkage to world and the solitude of its own status in relation to world.¹⁰⁰ The process of questioning

⁹⁷ Ibid. 170.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 171.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., §38b), p. 166.

this fundamental attunement, Heidegger says, has been one of '[liberating] the humanity in man', of 'loading Dasein upon man as his ownmost burden'.¹⁰¹

Heidegger claims that what is required now is a 'courage of mood [*Mut*]', a spiritedness and determination to arm ourselves with these three fundamental metaphysical contexts and really begin to do metaphysics.¹⁰² We have been left with the knowledge that Dasein's relation to world is singular and tenuous; Dasein *is* this relation, this finitude, this 'rupturing' in *physis*. We know now why it is that Dasein comes to do metaphysics via a fundamental attunement—that is, only via a process of being 'gripped' by concepts. As finitude, as a rupturing, as a negativity, Dasein must hold fast to beings. We have become acquainted with the contemporary manifestation that this 'being gripped' has—one of emptiness, absence, boredom in the face of our own existence. The effect of this attunement is to be understood, Heidegger says, in terms of 'lack, deprivation [and] *need*', all of which are evident in, and yet not understood by, the 'clamorous' intensity behind the proclamations of cultural psychology.¹⁰³ These proclamations attempt to remove the ambiguity and uncertainty of Dasein's situation by crystallising the concept of a division between the human's earthly, sensible nature and the 'higher' faculty of its rationality. However, this very division does the worst damage: it propels the human being into profound boredom without endowing it with the curiosity needed to find its way through it. The concept of the life/spirit dichotomy attempts to distract from the sense of nullity and meaninglessness that shrouds human life, but it ends up pushing the human further away from knowledge of the essential absence, the primordial homesickness that structures its existence. Heidegger wants us to use his examination of the fundamental attunement of profound boredom to get us back to this knowledge; he wishes us to become gripped by the fact that we are essentially not gripped, rather than seeking shelter from this uncomfortable but essential knowledge by retreating behind the pronouncements of contemporary worldviews.

This absence at the core of Dasein's understanding of itself stems from the creeping realisation, dormant in profound boredom, of the finitude and solitude of Dasein's relation to world. From within this knowledge, this 'deeper' response to our attunement than the one we witnessed in the *Kulturphilosophie* of Spengler et al., Heidegger now wishes to *really* to

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. 167.

¹⁰³ Ibid., §38a), pp. 162–3.

'question what this fundamental attunement gives us to question', to 'question concerning what *oppresses* us in this fundamental attunement', to 'help bring to word that which Dasein wishes to speak about in this fundamental attunement'.¹⁰⁴

Heidegger's critique of *Kulturphilosophie* in Part One was an examination of the 'outer expression' of the contemporary situation. This is then replaced by an exposition of the internal character of the fundamental attunement that determines it. The result of this dual-pronged analysis is that we now have an idea of what it is that contemporary Dasein wishes to 'speak about'—namely, a realisation of the fundamental possibilities of Dasein that are implicit in the telling refusal of beings, and world, finitude, and solitude as concepts that are shown to be 'essential' and philosophically powerful in this attunement. Having provided this metaphysical context, Heidegger hopes that we are now in a position to examine and understand the ways in which the concepts of world, finitude, and individuation erupt in the contemporary epoch. We know that the 'worldview' approach is centred on the concepts of 'life' and 'spirit', whereas the more profound response points us in the direction of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics. In an effort fully to elucidate and comprehend the deeper response to our fundamental attunement, Heidegger considers it necessary first to get to grips with its more superficial outer expression. We can avoid responding to boredom by succumbing to the promises of cultural diagnosis only if we can recognise the points at which the delusions of this response begin and end.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., §38b), p. 167.

5

Life and Biology

The Animal World

From Boredom to Life

Boredom has a spectrum of profundity. At the deepest end of the spectrum, we discover world, finitude, and solitude as fundamental concepts of metaphysics and of Dasein, and at the superficial end we find the ‘handed down’ concepts of life and spirit.¹ Heidegger envisages us as readers of his lectures to be situated somewhere in the middle: we can either go deeper into boredom, or we can simply remain on its surface by subscribing to the ‘exciting’ prognostications of contemporary *Kulturphilosophie*.² Heidegger believes that our chances of taking the former route—of ‘going deeper’ and entering into a proper metaphysical engagement with ourselves and our situation—are far greater if we are able to recognise, comprehend, and hence avoid the distractions and misapprehensions of the latter route. We therefore need to acquaint ourselves intimately with the deliverances of the more superficial end of the spectrum. This, however, is not the only reason that Heidegger wishes to spend time elaborating the ‘uprooted’ contents of worldview and its application of the concepts of life and spirit. For Heidegger, a deeper understanding is concealed in the superficial interpretations of Spengler et al., albeit one of which these thinkers remain unaware. This deeper meaning pertains to the fact that the concepts of ‘life’ and ‘spirit’ that anchor their interpretations are in fact ‘divergent’, ‘unconnected’ reconfigurations of the ancient division in Plato’s Academy between *physis* and *ēthos*.³

I have already indicated that, for Heidegger, the ‘scholastic splitting’ between *physis* and *ēthos* amounts to a way of interpreting and ordering the human’s singular relationship to *physis*, the way in which, as a result of its endowment of *logos*, the human ‘speaks out’ about the totality of beings

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §18a), p. 71.

² Ibid., §18c), p. 75.

³ Ibid., §10, p. 35.

while belonging to this very totality. Though the Presocratics existed in an enlightened awareness of the human's reciprocal relationship to *physis*, and did not circumscribe the human in a distinct region of beings that levitates above the rest of nature, post-Plato and the establishment of schools, the concept of the human being and all of its activities are subsumed under the title *ēthos*, a term that is seen as directly opposed to *physis*.⁴ I noted in Chapter 3 that Heidegger credits Nietzsche with capturing the more primordial sense of the human's relationship to *physis* through his interpretation of the concepts of the 'Dionysian' and the 'Apollonian'. Nietzsche, Heidegger says, correctly envisages these forces not as properties of the human being but as its most basic 'orientations'.⁵ Heidegger describes Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian as a blend of cruelty and exuberance, as the source of all growth, creativity, and destruction. Meanwhile, the Apollonian, the 'urge for everything that simplifies', which, according to Nietzsche, has been dominant in Western culture since the Presocratics, exerts a tempering, ordering force, one that is implicit in Heidegger's account in his *Preliminary Appraisal* of the antiquated separation and organisation of scholarly disciplines.⁶ The result of this force, which aims to render all things 'strong, clear, unambiguous and typical', means that knowledge of what Heidegger terms the 'perilousness' of the human's situation is repeatedly disarticulated and watered down.⁷

Despite the derivative character of the concepts of life and spirit, their instalment in contemporary *Kulturphilosophie* amounts to a pale imitation of this deeper understanding and its articulation by Nietzsche. Even though these concepts belong to interpretations that are 'borrowed second- and third-hand', we can see that they are borrowed from something significant, that they are superficial only in comparison to something deeper.⁸ In Part Two of the lecture course, Heidegger's principal goal is to look in more detail at the life/spirit opposition in contemporary thought, first in order to acquaint us further with the way in which it disarranges and distorts the ancient, more primordial conception of the human and its relationship to *physis*, and, secondly, in order to begin to retrieve this deeper understanding of the human from it.

Aside from worldview and *Kulturphilosophie*, there is another, thus far unexplored face of the deceptions of contemporary metaphysics, one that

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., §18a), p. 71.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, cited in ibid., §18a), 73; ibid., §10, p. 35.

⁷ Ibid., §18b), p. 73; §6b), β), p. 19.

⁸ Ibid., §18a), p. 71.

Heidegger hints at in his *Preliminary Appraisal*. Heidegger claims here that metaphysics tends to posture as both science and worldview, despite the fact that it is neither of these.⁹ Having looked at the 'worldview' side of this dichotomy in his analysis of *Kulturphilosophie* in Part One, Heidegger now wishes to explore aspects of the 'science' side in Part Two. Specifically, Heidegger opts for a lengthy examination of the life sciences. This decision comes about as a result of Heidegger's overall aim to identify the lineage that runs from the ancient conception of the human's status within *physis*, through the *physis/éthos* division in Plato's Academy, into modern articulations of the life/spirit opposition. Heidegger continues to pursue this aim in Part Two by exploring the discipline that explicitly seeks to examine one side of the life/spirit divide: biology, and what the landscape of this discipline looks like in the contemporary situation.

If we pick up *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (*FCM*) and turn straight to Heidegger's analysis of biology without taking into account this metaphysical context that prefaces it, Heidegger's examination of the life sciences will look random and distinctly un-Heideggerian. Heidegger will appear, in these passages, to be adopting a novel range of interests based around biology, zoology, and ethology, which leads him uncharacteristically to speculate on the behaviour of a range of organisms and to frame his discussion within a hierarchical understanding of life. This is certainly what disturbs the commentators whom I discussed in Chapter 1, who interpret these sections of the lectures as an endorsement of an evaluative ontology of life. However, having looked in the previous three chapters at the material that introduces the discussion of biology in Part Two, I now wish to argue that it no longer seems so outrageous that Heidegger provides a summary of the contents of life-science research in a way that expresses blatant metaphysical prejudices. For the thrust of Heidegger's message in *FCM*, as in many other places, is that we must first understand the delusions of thinking, and how we ourselves came to be deluded, in order to retrieve and rearticulate more essential knowledge.

It is worth noting that, in pursuit of this goal of discovering something essential from out of the ravages of the contemporary situation, Heidegger spends far longer looking at biology than *Kulturphilosophie*. This is because, somewhat ironically perhaps, Heidegger considers the ontic-scientific research that he examines in Part Two to be more metaphysically fruitful

⁹ *Ibid.*, §1a), p. 1.

than the latter, ostensibly explicitly philosophical, discipline. Though biology never manages to break free from the conceptual confines of its field, it does unwittingly reveal something significant about our situation. For, through its examination of life as a category of beings, biology explores the idea that different types of living entity experience 'world' in different ways. Heidegger is not suggesting that biology hits upon the concept of world qua fundamental concept of metaphysics, but, rather, that, in its own vocabulary and using its own methodologies, the more profound biology of the time uses the concept of world to mark points of differentiation between organisms. In so doing biology provides an indication of the limitations of the concept of life, and of the point at which a distinct concept, spirit, takes over. By examining biology and, in particular, its use of the concept of 'world', Heidegger believes that we can develop our knowledge of the ways in which, in the contemporary epoch, ancient metaphysical knowledge is distorted and replaced by the modern concepts of life and spirit. By appraising the contemporary application of these concepts, Heidegger hopes that we will have a far greater chance of circumnavigating their pitfalls in order to recover a deeper metaphysical understanding.

I therefore wish to claim that what looks, at first, like a somewhat unsophisticated attempt by Heidegger to turn his hand to theoretical biology and comparative zoology is in fact a sideshow in the wider metaphysical project of *FCM*. Heidegger wishes to use these sections to uncover a series of metaphysical biases and presuppositions concerning life and spirit that arise within the fundamental attunement of profound boredom. It is as a result of this agenda that Heidegger presents his three controversial theses. We can recall that Heidegger posits these theses at the opening of his engagement with biology in Part Two. The stone, Heidegger says, is 'worldless', the animal is 'poor in world', and the human is 'world-forming'.¹⁰ These theses are intended to guide us into a discussion of biology that will reveal the metaphysics implicit within it. In positing these theses, Heidegger is attempting to bracket the knowledge of profound boredom that has been gained in Part One in order to appraise the more basic 'anthropological' attitude that he takes to be a standard of contemporary thinking, an attitude that is embodied in the work of Spengler, Scheler, Klages, and Ziegler. When Heidegger claims at the opening of Part Two that he will 'crudely' distinguish the human as a 'world-forming' being from the 'world-poor' animal

¹⁰ Ibid., §42, p. 177.

and the ‘worldless’ stone, he is attempting to render explicit the metaphysics that, he believes, inheres in this naive, fundamentally anthropological attitude, and to show how this comparative analysis, which is founded on the life/spirit distinction, plays out in contemporary biology as a discipline that is concerned with one side of this divide.¹¹ Heidegger wishes to demonstrate, in keeping with his earlier claims that a tendency towards compartmentalisation and stratification belongs to the history of metaphysics, that, if we look closely at the contemporary version of this compartmentalisation and stratification, we discover the fundamental divisions that he identifies in his three theses.

In order to substantiate this claim that contemporary biology, like *Kulturphilosophie*, is symptomatic of the fundamental attunement of profound boredom insofar as, like the ‘anthropological’ formulations of world-view in *Kulturphilosophie*, biology propagates a range of prejudices concerning the life/spirit divide, Heidegger begins to read his theses into the findings of biology.

Mechanism, Vitalism, and the ‘Pre-Paradigm’ Period in Early Twentieth-Century Biology

We can recall that critics take issue with Heidegger for exhibiting a somewhat confused relationship to biology. Heidegger, according to these discussants, dedicates a good deal of space to analysing the findings of biology, but ultimately flouts its results by denying any profound kinship between the human and non-human animals. Derrida remarks that Heidegger ‘presupposes [...] that there is one thing, one domain, one homogeneous type of entity, which is called animality *in general*, for which any example would do the job’.¹² Calarco raises a similar objection, claiming that, upon reading Heidegger’s three theses, we cannot ignore the fact that no zoologist would ever be ‘willing to make statements about the world-relations of animals *as such* when such structures have yet to be investigated empirically in most animal species’.¹³ However, bracketing for a moment my argument that Heidegger is formulating his interaction with biology only as part of a broader philosophical agenda, if we look directly at the biology to which Heidegger is responding, we find that it is largely based on an examination

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Derrida (1989: 57).

¹³ Calarco (2008: 27).

of precisely the kind of ‘structures’—that is, world-relations, that Calarco refers to, which are investigated from the unicellular organisms upwards.

In contemporary biology, Heidegger sees a plethora of suppositions and approaches that provide evidence of an underlying fundamental attunement, one that is articulated, in contemporary thought, in terms of the division between life and spirit. This metaphysical context sheds an interesting light on the interpretations of critics discussed in Chapter 1. An important point to note in this regard is that the standard reading of the lectures does not examine the metaphysical commitments of the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century biology that interests Heidegger. If we read the discussion of biology in the wake of Part One of the lecture course, we are ready to interpret the biological material that Heidegger presents here in the way that he intends us to—that is, as a raft on the metaphysical ocean of profound boredom, entirely at the mercy of the prejudices contained in the more superficial ‘science–worldview’ response to the attunement. By circumventing most of what Heidegger says in Part One, Derrida et al. assume that Heidegger is using and abusing biology to shore up his own metaphysical claims. However, the situation is more complex than this. Heidegger aims instead to trace the conceptual shifts that have recently occurred in biology, in order further to describe the situation we find ourselves in when we approach the question of life and the human’s relationship to life. He wishes to elucidate the metaphysics implicit in biology so that he can show that the theses are not simply his ‘private opinions’, they are not merely the expression of a classical desire ontologically to detach the human from the animal. Rather, the theses are continuous with the scientific approach of the contemporary situation, and their formulation further exposes the metaphysical biases that grip the age.¹⁴

Before examining Heidegger’s claims about biology in detail, I wish to give a general impression of the climate of the biology of his time, both from Heidegger’s perspective, and by looking independently at some of its principal theories. In so doing, I wish to argue that, during this period in its history, biology was a singularly ambiguous science that did indeed exploit the metaphysical conceptions and divisions that Heidegger ascribes to it. In order to appreciate the speculativeness of this phase of biology, we need note only that it comes decades prior to the discovery of the biochemical structure of DNA and the subsequent molecularisation of the concept of life. The

¹⁴ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 261.

epistemic insecurity of biology brought it into a natural engagement with philosophy. Some of the most important biologists of this period, including Karl Ernst von Baer and Jakob von Uexküll, were heavily influenced by German idealism and ancient ontology, and were often critical of key protagonists in their own field of research. For example, Baer and Uexküll were deeply sceptical of the idea that Darwinism provides an exhaustive account of life, and general disagreement concerning the nature of life and organicism development was widespread.¹⁵ It was, therefore, not the case that biology in the early twentieth century was producing a single, flat ontology, a genetic continuum that contains all entities including the human. Biology during this period was not a unified matrix of concepts ready to be simultaneously exploited and misconstrued by Heidegger in the way that the standard reading envisions.

Heidegger's observations come at a particularly turbulent point in the history of biology. For decades, biology had oscillated between radically opposed mechanistic and vitalistic conceptions of the organism. The mechanistic model, founded on Newtonian physics, is based, Heidegger says, on the supposition that 'we can build up the organism through recourse to its elementary constituents without first having grasped the building plan, i.e., the essence of the organism, in its fundamental structure and without keeping this structure in view as that which guides the construction'.¹⁶ Eighteenth-century vitalism, far from providing a solution to the enigma of life, never allowed the problem to arise, and instead posited a vital force in order to attempt to explain the self-organising character of the organism.¹⁷ The radical nature of the distinction between these two conceptions of life led to extreme disagreement between the major biologists of the period. On one side of the debate, Driesch and Uexküll sought to challenge the prevailing model of evolutionary biology, which had since developed into what they saw as a dangerously reductive Darwinist materialism. Meanwhile, exponents of this drive towards mechanism, most notably Jaques Loeb and Wilhelm Roux, aimed to render biology as epistemically secure and rigorous as physics and chemistry. They therefore opposed the more holistic depiction of life, which they saw as 'largely descriptive' and 'speculative' rather than experimental and rigorous.¹⁸

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the climate of biological research was predominantly mechanistic. Heidegger claims that, in the

¹⁵ See Uexküll (1926); Baer (2012)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §53, p. 223.

¹⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61a), p. 260.

¹⁸ Allen (2005: 262–3).

midst of this tendency towards mechanism, a cohort of life-science researchers had recently begun to defend biology against the 'tyranny' of the mechanical, physico-chemical model of life by 'attempting to restore autonomy to "life", as the *specific manner of being pertaining to animal and plant*, and to secure this autonomy for it'.¹⁹ Heidegger claims that the need for biology to assert itself as a singular discipline with its own peculiar subject matter stemmed from the dominant character of the mechanistic model of the organism.²⁰ Natural selection had proposed an account of life that placed all living beings, including the human, into a calculable biological continuum of increasing complexity, but had not managed to dissolve the aged disagreement between these two theories of organismic development. The field of biology at this stage in history exemplifies what Thomas Kuhn terms the 'pre-paradigm' period in scientific research, which is 'marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems and standards of solution'.²¹ Kuhn states that Darwin's discovery of evolution by natural selection is an instance of a 'major revolution' in science, but post-Darwinian research was still permeated with deep struggles concerning methodology.²² To the extent that these struggles ultimately pertained to profound metaphysical problems, they were not simply matters for 'puzzle solving', in the Kuhnian sense.²³ Kuhn argues that 'one of the things a scientific community acquires with a new paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions'.²⁴ During this period of life-science research in Germany, disagreement arose over the very nature of this criterion, because there was no decisive, fixed conception regarding how living organisms should be defined. Every aspect of research, from delimiting the phenomena under investigation to the role of the scientist and of science itself, was therefore intrinsically confused.

This pervasive confusion in contemporary biology takes us back once again to Heidegger's claims at the beginning of *FCM* concerning the general disaggregation of knowledge that takes place in the wake of Plato and Aristotle. Heidegger claims that the history that subsequently unfolds is one in which the ontic sciences, as well as philosophy, are forced to cope

¹⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §45b), p. 188).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kuhn (2012 [1962]: 48).

²² Ibid. 180.

²³ For Kuhn (*ibid.* 37), puzzles are 'that special category of problems that can serve to test ingenuity or skill in solution'. As such, puzzles are always considered to have a solution, otherwise they are not puzzles but 'problems' (*ibid.*).

²⁴ Ibid.

with the many 'divergent elements' of knowledge that are continually 'splitting apart'.²⁵ Contemporary biology, which, since the days of Aristotle, has subdivided into such fields as zoology, botany, anatomy, and ecology, provides an example of this struggle. In the light of this confusing fragmentation, the two core categories of 'life' and 'spirit', reconfigurations of the older concepts of *physis* and *ēthos*, are seized upon and ossified. Heidegger's aim, in his interpretation of early twentieth-century biology, is to capture the current stage of this process of ossification for the purpose of reversing it, of taking us back to the antiquated philosophical understanding of *physis* and our relationship to it.

Heidegger's Interpretation of Early Twentieth-Century Biology

Because he wishes simply to observe the metaphysical struggle contained in the mechanism–vitalism debate, Heidegger does not provide his own recommendations for a conception of the organism that will affirm, reject, or synthesise the prevailing models. It is crucial to bear in mind that Heidegger is using his three 'guiding theses' on the distinct world-relations of different beings in order to reveal the contemporary manner in which metaphysics separates and classifies entities. Having established this general context for his discussion, Heidegger goes on to demonstrate how the struggle between mechanism and vitalism arises as a result of the emergence of a metaphysical concept on the basis of which living beings are thought to differ. This is the concept of the 'world' of the organism. The concept arises most explicitly in Uexküll's work, in which, Heidegger claims, it is developed into an understanding of the comparative poverty of the organism's world.²⁶ Though this concept of the world of the organism is unexplored in mechanism and vitalism, both positions presuppose that the organism is open to something other than it, something beyond the brute materiality of its physical form. Despite the fact that mechanism does not endorse any such conception of openness, and vitalism quickly paints over it using the idea of a vital force that emerges from within the individual organism, the concept

²⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §10, p. 35).

²⁶ Ibid., §61, p. 264. I will reveal how this Uexküllian account of the organism relates to the concept of poverty specifically in the following section, where I will examine Heidegger's reading of Uexküll in more detail.

of this openness to something beyond the organism—this capability for producing organs that interact with an otherness, that is, the environment or world that it occupies and that produces stimuli that it can respond to—lays the groundwork for Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory, which renders the concept of the animal world explicit.

Insofar as it is committed to defining the organism as a machine-like entity—an aggregation of pieces of equipment that produce an outcome—the mechanistic conception of life would not admit of the explanatory importance or even existence of the 'world' of the organism. *Prima facie* this seems perfectly reasonable, because we would not, Heidegger argues, endow the item of equipment with its own plasticity, its own form of openness to a world. For example, the hammer, Heidegger says, is 'ready for hammering', but we would not describe the being of the hammer as an independent '*urge toward* hammering'.²⁷ This is because equipment does not have any kind of independent relationship to a world outside of its manifold of assignment relations. If the organism is nothing more than a bundle of pieces of equipment, it will surely be likewise worldless. However, despite this denial of a world to the organism, Heidegger considers the mechanistic conception to be implicitly committed to the idea that the organism, *unlike* the machine, does indeed exhibit its own independent relationship to a world.

When we consider the fact that the organism is independently capable of renewing, regulating, and reproducing itself in accordance with pressures from its environment, the organism-machine analogy begins to break down.²⁸ Mechanistic explanations do not capture the inner drive of the organism, the fact that it is not only susceptible to the effects of its environment, but that it is capable of having an effect *on* its environment. Unlike the organism, the '*ready-made piece of equipment*' is entirely lacking in independent capacities for self-renewal, regulation, or reproduction.²⁹ It remains 'subject to some implicit or explicit *prescription* with respect to its possible use. This prescription is not given by the readiness of the equipment, but is always derived from the plan which has already determined the production of the equipment and its specific equipmental character'.³⁰ Even if the organism could be understood as a complex of implements, it must be treated as an entity that responds to a prescriber of assignment relations, some kind of central agent or extrinsic governing plan. Its external natural

²⁷ Ibid., §53, p. 226.

²⁸ Ibid. 223.

²⁹ Ibid., §54, p. 228.

³⁰ Ibid.

environment must serve as the manager and maintainer of its various capacities, just as the piece of equipment is managed and maintained by its user. The mechanistic conception thus unintentionally ascribes a world-relation to the animal as an entity whose organs are open to direction, despite the fact that this idea clashes entirely with the principles of mechanism and is far more akin to the vitalistic, entelecheic explanation for organismic function.

Both mechanism and vitalism thus implicitly presuppose one irreducible fact about the organism: that it is open to something that goes beyond the constituents of its material form. According to this presupposition, the presence of which would, as we have seen, be vehemently denied by proponents of mechanism, 'life' denotes a singular class of entities that cannot be understood using the categories used to describe inert matter. A metaphysical distinction between the inanimate and the animate, therefore, begins to creep into biology. When we examine the metaphysics that is implicit here, we find that inert matter, along with the item of equipment divorced from its maker or user, is thought to lack capacities for self-regulation, self-renewal, and self-production. Inert matter possesses no capacities whatsoever; it does not have any kind of opening onto a world. It is on this basis that the stone is described in Heidegger's comparative examination as 'worldless'.³¹ Though Heidegger says comparatively little about the stone's world-relation, he seems to suggest that this concept of the worldlessness of inanimate matter provides biology with a crucial contrast case to the active, labile world-relation that circumscribes animality.

Heidegger argues that the singularity of the organism's world-relation has been shown by the more profound biology of the age to consist in the organism's interior ability to adapt its form according to the dictates of its environment. Though vitalism is more responsive to the idea of a set of capacities that distinguish animate from inanimate beings, Heidegger claims that vitalism simply 'eliminates the problem, i.e., it no longer allows one to arise'.³² It is not until Uexküll's pioneering *Umwelt* research that we see a deeper articulation of the relation between the organism's capacities and its external world. This research, according to Heidegger, marks the point at which biology has the freest and most transparent relationship to its metaphysical prejudices concerning life.

³¹ Ibid., §42, p. 177.

³² Ibid., §53, p. 223.

Heidegger wishes to reveal the conceptual heritage of Uexküll's research by going right back to basics and undergoing a lengthy examination of the concept that unites all biological theories of the time: that of the 'organism'. Heidegger claims that, according to both mechanism and vitalism, 'everything that lives is an *organism*'.³³ It is the organism, and not the cell, or aggregate of cells, that is the most significant category in biology. This means that

the concept of a 'living substance', a vital mass or 'life-stuff', is a meaningless one. For the idea of 'stuff' or 'substance' in this sense specifically denies the character of the living being as an organism. The living being is always an organism. Its organic character is what determines the unity of this particular living being in each case.³⁴

According to biology, Heidegger says, the category 'organism' includes all entities that '[possess] organs'.³⁵ What, then, does biology consider an organ to be? Heidegger suggests that, if we examine the history of the term 'organ', we will be able to discover more about the way in which biology interprets the concept of 'life', and how disagreement over the term leads to the contemporary battle between mechanism and vitalism.³⁶

The term 'organ', Heidegger says, has its roots in the Greek word *oργανόν*, which means 'instrument', and *εργατόν*, which means 'work'.³⁷ This etymology defines the organ in advance of all distinct biological theories as a 'working instrument'.³⁸ Heidegger claims that Wilhelm Roux, taking this definition as a point of departure, defines the organism as a 'complex of instruments'.³⁹ This 'instrumental' interpretation of the organism, Heidegger says, raises important questions that Roux himself overlooks. How, based on this definition, are we to distinguish the organism from the machine?⁴⁰ Does the definition designate the genuine essence of the organism? It appears to place organisms in precisely the same category as non-living systems and so fails to tell us anything specific about life. For Heidegger, Roux's conception of the organism as a series of instruments covers over the question of the important correlations and distinctions between various kinds of being: the being of instruments, of machines, of material things, and of the organ and organism.⁴¹ Heidegger wishes to clarify the ontological connections and distinctions that are overlooked here.

³³ Ibid., §51a), p. 212.
³⁸ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.
⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 213.
⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

All equipmental items including vehicles, machines, and instruments, Heidegger says, are products of human activity. This poses an immediate problem for the definition of the organ as an instrument, because the organism, unlike an item of equipment, is not the result of human action. Heidegger examines a series of examples in order to clarify the ontological difference between the organ and the piece of equipment, focusing in particular on the distinct ways in which instruments and organs serve a 'purpose' with respect to the structure that they belong to. Using the example of a pen, Heidegger then identifies a further distinction between a piece of equipment and a machine. The pen is not a machine designed to produce writing; it is a piece of equipment *for* writing. This basic distinction appears to destabilise Roux's definition of the organism:

[A] machine is not identical with an instrument, nor is an instrument identical with a piece of equipment. Consequently, it is already impossible to understand the machine as a complex of instruments or as a complicated kind of instrument. And if the organism is as different from a machine as the machine is from a piece of equipment, then the definition of the organism as a complex of instruments must certainly collapse altogether.⁴²

Mechanism treats the organ instrumentally as something that is serviceable for a particular purpose, in the same way that the pen is serviceable for writing.⁴³ The eye, for example, is thus 'for seeing', just as the pen is 'for writing'. The eye is part of a dynamic of cause and effect: it is a 'means' to the 'end' of vision. Heidegger claims that this means-end conception of the organism is so pervasive and familiar that it is rarely called into question within biology.⁴⁴ However, when the *ontological* character of the eye is compared with that of the pen, we can see that this conception is fundamentally problematic. When we question which features essentially distinguish the organ from the item of equipment, we arrive at the concept of motility. As an essentially motile entity, the organ is capable of self-production, self-regulation, and self-renewal.⁴⁵ Is there any possibility of this vital motility being explained mechanically, in terms of instrumentality?

Heidegger claims later in the chapter that Driesch addresses this question, and concludes that the mechanistic conception of the organism has no

⁴² Ibid., pp. 214–15.

⁴³ Ibid. 215.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 216.

⁴⁵ Ibid., §53, p. 223.

resources for explaining the vital motility belonging to organs and to the organism as a whole.⁴⁶ The mechanistic idea that the eye is 'for seeing' fails to acknowledge that, unlike the pen, the eye is not productive of something *external* to it.⁴⁷ When considered in this way, the eye appears to have nothing whatsoever in common with the pen. Alternatively, this apparent distinction may indicate that the eye simply has a different kind of instrumentality from that of the pen, an instrumentality that is internal to the organ rather than productive of some external effect. Is the decisive realisation for biology, therefore, that organs produce the capacities with which they are endowed? Is it the case, Heidegger asks, that 'the eye produces the retina and along with it what is visible and seen'?⁴⁸ This idea prompts a further question for Heidegger, one that points towards the core of the ontological comparison between organs and equipment: '*Can the animal see because it has eyes, or does it have eyes because it can see?*'⁴⁹ In other words, what is it that provides the condition for the possibility of the animal's possession of eyes? Heidegger claims that, in line with the Aristotelian tradition that is evident in the more metaphysically profound biology of the time, the animal has eyes because it can see. But having eyes is not equivalent to the ability to see: 'It is the *potentiality for seeing* which first makes the possession of eyes possible, makes the possession of eyes necessary in a specific way.'⁵⁰ This making-possible the possession of eyes does constitute a kind of serviceability, and it is 'on the basis of *this* serviceability that the organ comes into its closest proximity to equipment, to an instrument in general, and is usually identified with it'.⁵¹

First and foremost, the serviceability of the pen differs from the serviceability of the eye because the pen, unlike the eye, is an '*independent* being, something that is to hand for use by *various different* human beings'.⁵² The eye does not possess this kind of equipmental independence. Eyes, and organs generally, are 'not present at hand independently of the way in which an object of use or a piece of equipment is present, for they are incorporated into the being that makes use of them'.⁵³ The organ cannot be split off from the organism and at the same time retain its mode of being as an organ. It is irreducibly integrated into the structure of the organism as a whole. Heidegger believes that, in recent times, this realisation is most clearly articulated by Uexküll.⁵⁴ In his 1926 work *Theoretical Biology*, Uexküll claims the following: 'There is no morphology of implements as

⁴⁶ Ibid., §61b), p. 262.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., §52, p. 218.

⁵¹ Ibid. 219.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. ⁵⁴ Ibid., §61b), p. 263).

there is of organisms; this is partly explained by the fact that implements are not constructed, as organisms are, from similar primary elements, and consequently are not derivable from shiftings, in accordance with law, of the same primordial mosaic.⁵⁵ This disanalogy, for Heidegger, furnishes biology with the crucial realisation that the kind of serviceability we observe in the organ is other than that exhibited in the case of the piece of equipment. The pen produces writing and is thus 'complete' only when it has provided this service. As a complete piece of equipment, the pen possesses a particular 'readiness' that renders it suitable for use.⁵⁶ Upon close examination, this quality of 'being ready' cannot, Heidegger says, be equal to the labile and independent 'capability' possessed by the organ.⁵⁷ The pen is essentially an inert object: it has no capability for writing in and of itself. The eye, by contrast, intrinsically possesses the capacity for seeing, and this capacity is not detachable from the rest of the organism. If it is isolated from the organism, it is no longer an eye at all.⁵⁸ Taken by itself, Heidegger says, the eye is unable to see, because its capacity for vision ultimately belongs to, and develops out of, the whole organism.⁵⁹ It is the *organism* as a manifold of interdependent capacities, rather than the eye taken by itself, that is capable of seeing.⁶⁰ The organ is serviceable with respect to a possibility for seeing that belongs to the whole organism, and it is in this manner that the capacity emerges out of the organism as a whole. This sense of capacity is distinct from the equipmental mode of serviceability as readiness. The implication of this distinction is that the organ cannot be regarded as something discrete and manipulable. The organism must be grasped as a motile entity that is responsive to the possibilities of the entire organism, which is in turn connected to a surrounding environmental world, and cannot be treated as a static, isolable instrument.

For Heidegger, the important distinction that is emerging in his analysis of the implicit conceptual suppositions of contemporary biology is this one between *readiness* and *capacity*, for this distinction illuminates the deep conceptual problems that underlie the mechanism–vitalism clash and, at the same time, illuminate biology's fundamental assumptions concerning the difference between the living and the non-living. Capacity, Heidegger claims, is not distinguishable from readiness simply on the grounds that, unlike readiness, it expresses a particular type of potentiality.⁶¹ Rather, '*being capable* and *being ready for...* announce a *fundamentally different manner*

⁵⁵ Uexküll (1926: 187).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 221.

⁵⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §52, p. 220).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., §53, p. 222.

of *being* in each case'.⁶² What precisely is the relation between the physical organ and the capacity? Heidegger claims that, according to an important discovery made principally by Uexküll, the capacities of the organism are thought to be given expression through its various organs. The organism's capacities are understood in this sense as capable of producing the organs.⁶³

An explanation for this production of organs via capacities can be sought, Heidegger says, in the concept of 'drive' (*Trieb*).⁶⁴ Whereas the readiness of the piece of equipment is always dependent on a 'prescription' concerning its 'proper use', the development of capacities, by contrast, is 'driven' by the organism itself.⁶⁵ Having claimed that equipment is always experienced within a context of involvements, and that its readiness is always dependent upon a 'prescription'—whether explicit or implicit—regarding its 'possible use', Heidegger now wants to emphasise that capacity, by contrast, is inherently self-regulating: '[The organism] *drives itself toward its own capability for...* This self-driving and being driven toward its wherefore is only possible in that which is capable inasmuch as capability is in general *instinctually driven* [*triebhaft*]. Capacity is only to be found where there is drive'.⁶⁶ Whereas equipmental readiness reaches its completion in being used with respect to its serviceability, drive is always a striving-out towards the possibilities of the organism's various capacities. As such, the organ is *subservient* to its capacities, but this subservience is not of the order of the present at hand 'serviceability for...', which characterises equipment.⁶⁷ The self-regulatory capacity of the organism is a capacity to maintain a degree of plasticity in relation to its environment and to its own organisation. It is thus 'a structure of instinctually organised anticipatory responses in each case which prescribes the sequence of movements that arises as soon as the capacity comes into play. In its specific being, the capacity in its self-driving movement has always already *anticipated* its possible range of achievement'.⁶⁸

The significance of this point is likely to be lost in the vast torrent of information Heidegger presents on modern interpretations of the organism, but I would like to stress its importance in the remainder of this section. Heidegger's discussion of the organism culminates in this observation: that the organism's various capacities discern how and when they should develop in order to preserve the life of the organism. Heidegger describes this idea as a significant breakthrough in biology, one that he is attempting to capture

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., §57, p. 235.

⁶⁴ Ibid., §54, p. 228.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., §55, p. 230.

⁶⁸ Ibid., §54, p. 229.

and emphasise when he describes the organism as confined to an 'encircling ring' (*Umring*).⁶⁹ According to this concept, the organism only ever acts in accordance with the 'already anticipated' possibilities opened up by its particular set of capacities, which, in turn, are activated by stimuli from within its environment. This discovery marks a total rejection of mechanism, because it is entirely incompatible with the idea that the organism taken as a whole could be understood along the same lines as the functioning of a machine:

The machine not only requires a builder in order to be a machine at all, it also has to be operated. The machine cannot stop or change its operation by itself, whereas the organism initiates, regulates and changes its own motility. Finally, if the machine is damaged, for example, then it requires repair or maintenance by others, and this can only be done by the specific manner of being belonging to be a being which is also capable of producing a machine. The organism, on the other hand, repairs and renews itself within certain limits. *Self-production* in general, *self-regulation* and *self-renewal* are obviously aspects which characterise the organism over against the machine and which also illuminate the peculiar ways in which its capacity and capability as an organism are directed.⁷⁰

Implicit in the discovery that capacities 'articulate' organs according to the needs presented by the environment is the idea that the animal is open to something other than it—that is, the range of possibilities that are illuminated within its environment. The implication here is that the animal inhabits a kind of 'world'. This idea has far greater explanatory power than both mechanism and vitalism. The failure in these positions to deal with what it means for the organism to be open to its environment accounts for their inability, from Heidegger's perspective, to provide an interesting interpretation of the essence of the organism.

Heidegger argues that, thanks to his recognition of the explanatory importance of the concept of 'world' in biology, Uexküll provides a far more illuminating angle when it comes to dealing with the vital motility of organisms. Uexküll goes further than both mechanism and vitalism in his realisation that the organism can be understood only in relation to its environmental world. In order to illustrate this more profound angle,

⁶⁹ Ibid., §61b, p. 263.

⁷⁰ Ibid., §53, p. 222.

Heidegger cites Uexküll's example of the way in which protozoa navigate their environments. This simple life form gains nourishment by absorbing and then expelling particles that are taken in via its cell membrane. For this purpose the protozoon possesses 'an aperture which first becomes a mouth, then a stomach, then an intestine and finally an anal tract'.⁷¹ Despite its absence of a complex system of organs, the protozoon, according to Uexküll, provides an ideal example of the definitive traits of all organisms, because it demonstrates the necessity of constant interaction with an environment. Heidegger claims that Uexküll's example of the functioning of this polymorphous organism indicates a deep understanding of the distinction between 'capacity' and 'readiness', and hence the weaknesses of the organ-implant and organism-machine analogies as well as the significance of the idea of the 'surrounding world' of the animal.⁷² Human implements, Uexküll says, insofar as they are created by a maker external to them, exhibit a 'centripetal architecture' as opposed to the 'centrifugal architecture' of organisms that develop out of the single 'building stone' of the germ.⁷³ This 'centrifugal architecture' is constructed in such a way that it interlocks the organism with whatever environment it inhabits.

Uexküll's big realisation, for Heidegger, is that it is meaningless not only to try conceptually to isolate the organ from the organism, but also to separate the organism from its environment. This environment circumscribes all of the entities and stimuli that trigger individual organic capacities and cannot therefore be deducted from our understanding of organic function. It is here that we observe the genesis of an explicit focus on 'world' as a comparative concept in biology. The functioning of the protozoon is understood in relation to the stimuli that it responds to. These stimuli are highly limited and specialised, which means that the protozoon is constituted by a similarly limited and specialised morphology. In this Uexküllian comparative analysis of animal *Umwelten*, we begin to get an impression of the conceptual background of Heidegger's description of the animal as 'world-poor'. The animal is understood as having a world in Uexküll's biology, but its degree of openness to this world is restricted. Uexküll uses the term *Umwelt*, rather than *Welt*, to describe the space belonging to the animal, and this suggests that the animal is confined to something narrower than a world, or perhaps to a narrow kind of world. The idea of a reciprocal relationship between an environment and the organism, which results in the

⁷¹ Ibid. 224.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Uexküll (1926: 189).

development of organic capacities that bind the organism to its environment, presupposes that this is a closed relationship. The organism cannot one day decide to augment its environment and take in a wider range of stimuli, because its mode of adaptation and hence its survival depend upon a tight coupling with a specific natural habitat. Heidegger's thesis that the animal is 'poor in world' is an attempt to express, as specifically and baldly as possible, precisely what is metaphysically implicit in this Uexküllian account.

Heidegger claims that Uexküll cannot be given full credit for this approach, which relies on a concept of 'wholeness' that was developed in Driesch's neovitalist research.⁷⁴ He states that we must therefore ascribe significance to Driesch's work, as well as to Uexküll's. Heidegger's analysis of their respective observations is not, as Krell suggests, a matter of academic 'diligence', included in order to portray knowledge of biology only to supersede and undermine it.⁷⁵ Heidegger does not wish to use Driesch and Uexküll to confirm his own metaphysical hypotheses. Though it looks at first glance as if Heidegger is postulating the world-poverty of the animal, and then turning to biology and zoology to seek confirmation, the situation is in fact the reverse. It is as a result of his reading of Driesch, and Uexküll in particular, that Heidegger formulates the comparative examination in terms of world and the idea that world varies in scope between different kinds of being. Heidegger's examination of mechanism and the 'instrumental' conception of the organism revealed that items of equipment and machines, insofar as they are essentially inert objects with functions assigned to them, do not have a world, and are therefore unsuitable for comparison with organs. Inert objects are simply 'worldless'. The thesis on world-poverty is then used to express the move made by Uexküll in which the organism is described as an entity that is always entangled with an environment, and that possesses organs that are developed in accordance with the pressures of its environment.⁷⁶

Heidegger insists that neither mechanism, nor vitalism, nor Uexküll's *Umwelt* research can confront the deepest metaphysical questions and problems from which their work develops without abandoning biology in favour of philosophy. They cannot, according to Heidegger, respond in a

⁷⁴ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 261).

⁷⁵ Krell (2013: 67).

⁷⁶ I will suspend discussion of the thesis that the human is 'world-forming' until Chapter 6, where I will return to Heidegger's critique of anthropological *Darstellung* presented in Part One of *FCM*.

deep, philosophical manner to the fundamental attunement of the age. In the *Preliminary Appraisal*, Heidegger presages this point by arguing that any comparison between philosophy and science amounts to a ‘fateful debasement’ of the essence of philosophy.⁷⁷ In Volume III of his lecture course on Nietzsche, Heidegger emphasises this point again, stating that biology never decides, in a philosophically astute way, ‘*what* is living and *that* such beings are. Rather, the biologist as biologist makes use of this decision as one already made, one that is necessary for him.’⁷⁸ The background metaphysics that determines the ontological categorisations that make up the history of attempts to define life cannot be questioned from the perspective of biology, because biology itself would be inconceivable outside of these categorisations. Heidegger claims that,

if the biologist as this specific person makes a decision about what is to be addressed as living, he nonetheless does not make this decision *as a biologist*, nor with the means, the forms of thought, and the proofs of his science; here he speaks as a metaphysician, as a human being who, beyond the field in question, thinks beings as a whole.⁷⁹

When Heidegger credits Uexküll with a clear knowledge and articulation of the principles and categorisations that allow biology to get going, he is crediting Uexküll as a pioneering biologist rather than as a philosopher capable of comprehending the fundamental metaphysical concepts that determine the contemporary age.

Though it initially appears obscure and in need of much clarification, the principle that emerges from the conflict between mechanism and vitalism, and from Uexküll’s study of the surrounding world of the animal in particular, is the idea that the animal possesses a world, and that this world is delimited by the stimuli that are relevant for it. Heidegger claims that the animal is, in this sense, ‘poor’ in world—that is, ‘confined to its environmental world, immured as it were within a fixed sphere that is incapable of further expansion or contraction’.⁸⁰ This statement is an explication of the metaphysics implicit in Uexküll, the idea that, though it is responsive to a particular environment, world ‘as a whole’ is somehow refused to the animal. The protozoan cannot decide to pursue random environmental

⁷⁷ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §1a), p. 2.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Heidegger (1982 [1936–7]): 42.

⁸⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §47, p. 198).

triggers, because its entire organism is developed in accordance with only one or two impulses.

I will now attempt to clarify further how and why Heidegger's thesis on the world-poverty of the animal is derivable from out of the ontological definitions and distinctions drawn in contemporary biology, and from Uexküll's work in particular, by examining more closely Heidegger's engagement with both Driesch and Uexküll.

A Metaphysically Illuminating Phase in Biology: Heidegger's Reading of Driesch and Uexküll

Prior to turning to Heidegger's engagement with Driesch and Uexküll specifically, I will give a very brief account of the heritage of the findings of these two biologists. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Roux, a pioneer of the mechanistic conception of the organism, attempted to provide a description of life processes that would eliminate all notions of a non-material, inexplicable 'vital force' at the heart of an organism's life. He developed what he termed a 'mosaic theory' of life. This theory, G. E. Allen says, was based on the idea that, with every cell division, hereditary units were 'parcelled out in such a way that each cell generation received increasingly specialised particles' and 'by the time differentiation was complete each cell type (muscle, nerve, skin) contained only the particles determining that cell's specific characteristics'.⁸¹ In line with this hypothesis, Roux experimented with *in vitro* parthenogenesis.⁸² In one of his most famous investigations, Roux discovered that, when one of the two blastomeres of a frog egg is killed, the remaining blastomere is still capable of developing into half an embryo under the right conditions. Soon after this experiment, which led, Allen says, to an entirely new research programme, Driesch undertook a series of similar experiments based on the reproductive process in sea urchins. Rather than destroying one of the two blastomeres, as Roux had done, Driesch separated them. He discovered that the single blastomere managed to reorganise itself post-separation and proceeded to develop into a whole larva of a smaller than average size, rather than, as Roux had predicted, into half an embryo. Though he initially sought a

⁸¹ Allen (2005: 270).

⁸² Parthenogenesis is a type of asexual reproduction during which an embryo develops without fertilisation.

physico-chemical explanation for ontogenesis, in the wake of these experiments Driesch eventually abandoned this idea in favour of vitalistic explanations.⁸³ Despite the fact that Roux's investigations had been highly influential, Driesch and Uexküll did not consider his experiments in parthenogenesis to be decisive for determining what makes an organism 'alive', nor capable of proving that the organism functions in the same way as a machine. Driesch's work had served to demonstrate that 'no machine could reconstruct the whole out of individual parts'.⁸⁴

The most determinative result of Driesch's experiments, Heidegger says, was 'the breakthrough of the *idea of the whole*—wholeness as such as the determining factor', when it came to understanding the properties of life.⁸⁵ This emergence of the concept of wholeness, reinforced by empirical observation, entailed a movement away from the dominant mechanistic approach, which had 'turned to the cell as the primal element of living things, but did so not in such a way that it attempted from there to put together the organism which had already been misunderstood in its essence and shattered into a heap of fragments, while the cell itself was still considered in a chemico-physical fashion'.⁸⁶ The 'whole' in Driesch's analysis consists in the corporeal totality of the organism—that is, the whole of the animal's body. Uexküll's position differs from Driesch's because Uexküll envisages the organism not as a range of discrete monadic units, but as a totality of reciprocally interrelated entities, each of which has a degree of openness to something other. This 'other' is the environment out of which the organism emerges, and in which it encounters stimuli that trigger its drives. Heidegger claims that, insofar as he neglects the question of this exteriority pertaining to every organic entity, Driesch does not go far enough.⁸⁷ His research is, Heidegger says, the first important step away from the idea that the organism is an assemblage of implements, but the second step, which directly addresses the relation of the animal to its environment, is taken by Uexküll.⁸⁸

For Uexküll, a picture of organismic function could be achieved only through an examination of animal behaviour, which in turn demands an understanding of the way in which the animal relates to its *Umwelt*. Uexküll's work is met with controversy, a controversy that Uexküll attributes to the 'denial' among physiologists and zoologists of the existence of the invisible 'unknown' worlds that encircle all organisms.⁸⁹ This denial is

⁸³ Allen (2005: 271).

⁸⁶ Ibid. 261.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 262.

⁸⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 262.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 263.

⁸⁹ Uexküll (2010 [1934]: 41).

based, Uexküll says, on the conviction that access to these worlds is impossible, and speculation concerning their contents therefore futile, an attitude that emerges from a mechanistic outlook that debars *ab initio* any exploration of animal worlds: 'Whoever wants to hold on to the conviction that all living things are only machines should abandon all hope of glimpsing [animal] environments.'⁹⁰ By adopting the machine view, one 'forgets', Uexküll says, 'that one has from the outset suppressed the principal factor, namely the *subject* who uses these aids, who affects and perceives them'.⁹¹ In order to characterise the surrounding world of the animal, two factors belonging to the structure of the organism must be examined. First, it must be noted that the range of entities that the animal subject perceives belong to its 'perception world' (*Merkwelt*), and, secondly, that every action and behaviour that the subject produces belongs to what Uexküll names its 'effect world' (*Wirkwelt*).⁹² These two dimensions, taken together, 'form one closed unit, the *environment*'.⁹³ Uexküll envisages this environment as a kind of bubble that surrounds each organism, containing 'all the features accessible to the subject'.⁹⁴ Within this bubble the animal picks up on a specific series of stimuli, and the range of stimuli that the animal is capable of reacting to will vary depending on its complexity. According to Uexküll, if biology manages to avoid the convenient but flawed instrumental explanations of life, it will be capable of taking a richer and more complex approach to the study of animality, one that recognises that the 'corporeal totality' of the animal organism is of limited use when it comes to building up a picture of organic life.

When I claim that this Uexküllian angle is more 'illuminating' for Heidegger than that pertaining to mechanism or vitalism, I do not wish to suggest that Heidegger is deeply committed to Uexküll's being correct about organisms and how they function. Rather, I wish to imply that Uexküll's work exhibits, for Heidegger, a more profound awareness of the underlying principles of biology than the latter, less-refined theories. We know, from Part One of *FCM*, that Heidegger considers all contemporary modes of analysis, insofar as they unfold within the attunement of profound boredom, to be at the whim of a fixed set of metaphysical schemas that are characterised by a tendency to divide 'life' from 'spirit'. It is not the case that Heidegger believes Uexküll to be liberated from this tendency. Indeed, as a scientist working in the contemporary epoch, Uexküll is not, for Heidegger,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. 42.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 43.

in the business of discerning or exploiting such metaphysical definitions and trends. However, Heidegger's interest in Uexküll can be attributed to the fact that the subtle sensitivity of Uexküll's theoretical biology unwittingly renders explicit some of the defining themes of the contemporary *zeitgeist*.

Uexküll's incidental articulation of this *zeitgeist* has two dimensions. The first concerns Uexküll's methodology. Uexküll makes it his business to recognise and internally critique the key ontological distinctions that emerge in biology. In the contemporary situation, as Heidegger understands it, these distinctions arise all over the place. Life is separated from spirit, and, within the purview of biology, the discipline that studies life, many other distinctions are drawn. Uexküll is unusual, according to Heidegger, in his ability to interrogate these distinctions, and in managing, as a result of the knowledge he gains in this interrogation, to investigate the living organism in its '*particular and fundamental manner of being*', to make 'life' the genuine subject matter of his biology, rather than explaining away living phenomena in terms of non-living machines.⁹⁵ The second dimension of Uexküll's sensitivity to the *zeitgeist* in which he works concerns the nature of the concepts that he makes use of. In positing the organism's definitive openness to something other than it—that is, its surrounding world, a world that delimits its range of motion and hence 'impoverishes' it—Uexküll has managed to hit upon the concepts that, according to Heidegger, firmly characterise '*that fundamental conception in relation to the essence of life* within which every consideration of the essence of life moves'.⁹⁶ In other words, Uexküll's conception of the animal's relation to its world represents the pinnacle of the various contemporary attempts to define life. Heidegger claims that the insight that is expressed in Uexküll's work is one that was 'long neglected' in the nineteenth century, 'less because this fundamental conception of life was unknown than because it was suppressed by the prevailing mechanistic and physicalist approach to nature. The courage was lacking to take seriously what was intrinsically known, i.e. to unfold the essence of life in its genuine and proper content'.⁹⁷ Uexküll's work is important, not because it is seminal, but because it possesses this 'courage' to begin to turn towards what is 'intrinsically known' but rarely attended to in biology.

What does Heidegger take this 'intrinsic knowledge' to be and where does it stem from? If we place Uexküll's *Umwelt* research into the context of the

⁹⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §57, p. 235).

⁹⁶ Ibid., §61a), p. 260.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

history of the concept of life in German biology and philosophy, we soon find other traces of the vital concepts that he makes use of. Over a hundred years prior to Uexküll's formulation of his theory, Johann Gottfried von Herder expressed very similar reflections in his *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, in which he observes a correlation between the complexity of an organism and the degree to which it is wedded to an environmental niche, a narrow sphere in which organisms seamlessly and unwittingly respond to natural stimuli: 'Each animal has its circle [Kreis] to which it belongs from birth, into which it immediately enters, in which it remains all its life, and in which it dies.'⁹⁸ In between Herder and Uexküll, the idea of the animal *Umwelt* was pioneered by Karl Ernst von Baer, who was, Heidegger says, the first biologist to recognise that animals have access to their own surrounding world.⁹⁹ The significance of Baer's work and the influence it could have had was, Heidegger says, 'impeded and finally buried by the movement of Darwinism' and the mechanistic reductionism of life that developed out of it.¹⁰⁰ Despite this resistance, Baer's biology managed to capture something 'essential in the first half of the last century', something that was subsequently covered over by the reductionism of mechanism and the incautious speculations of vitalism.¹⁰¹

We can thus see that Uexküll's reflections were in keeping with a general current of thought that was developing during his time. It is because Uexküll's work makes use of ideas that are, unbeknownst to him, epoch-making in their nature that Heidegger sustains such a keen interest in it. Heidegger is in pursuit of the metaphysical principles that ground the contemporary situation, and, in Uexküll, he finds a compelling expression of some of these principles. In this respect, Heidegger is treating Uexküll in the same manner as he treats the four philosophers of culture he discusses in Part One. Through an investigation of Uexküll's work, Heidegger is attempting to expand his knowledge of the fundamental attunement that grips the contemporary age and the possible responses we may have to it. We know that, in his discussion of profound boredom, Heidegger indicates that *Dasein* can have either a deep and 'courageous' or a superficial response to this attunement.¹⁰² Though Uexküll does not read his biology into the history of metaphysics and its mutating moods, Heidegger seems to regard Uexküll's work as being situated closer to the former end of this spectrum of

⁹⁸ Herder (2002 [1772]: 78).

⁹⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1925–6]: 181).

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61a), p. 260.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., §38, pp. 166–7.

possible responses than other contemporary biologists. Unlike the proponents of mechanism and vitalism, Uexküll provides an account of the origins, implications, and limitations of the concept of life in contemporary biology. Still, we can question why this account is of such great significance for Heidegger. The fact that Uexküll succeeds in laying bare the metaphysical prejudices of biology does not mean that he himself is liberated from these prejudices. Uexküll's *Umwelt*-based comparative study of animal species is still confined, according to Heidegger, to the pervasive metaphysical distinction between life and spirit. In his own articulation of contemporary notions of the essence of animality in terms of 'poverty in world', Heidegger describes all such comparative claims, including Uexküll's, as 'crude'.¹⁰³ When Heidegger describes the three theses as 'statements of essence', he therefore wishes to imply that they are essential in and for the contemporary age that forms the background of his study in *FCM*; he does not wish to endorse them as essential definitions 'for all time'.¹⁰⁴

The Derivative Character of Heidegger's Conception of Animality

I have been arguing that Heidegger bases his claim that the animal is 'poor in world' on what he considers to be metaphysically implicit in Uexküll's depiction of the organism as confined to a surrounding environment. In this section I will defend this argument further by highlighting more specifically the link between Heidegger's analysis of world-poverty and Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory. I hope to convey, in my reading of these passages, an original way of interpreting this part of *FCM*, one that presents an alternative to the standard reading detailed in Chapter 1. The following passage serves directly to challenge Krell's claim that Heidegger examines biology merely as a matter of thoroughness and diligence.¹⁰⁵ It also clarifies emphatically the purpose of Heidegger's engagement with Uexküll in *FCM*:

[Uexküll's] investigations are very highly valued today, but they have not yet acquired the fundamental significance they could have if a more radical interpretation of the organism were developed on their basis. In this connection the totality of the organism would not merely consist in the

¹⁰³ Ibid., §42, p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., §61a), p. 260.

¹⁰⁵ Krell (2013: 67).

corporeal totality of the animal, but rather this corporeal totality could itself only be understood on the basis of that original totality which is circumscribed by what we called the *disinhibiting ring*.¹⁰⁶

It is clear from this passage that Heidegger conceives of his own characterisation of the disinhibiting *Umrīng* of the animal as a derivation of Uexküll's depiction of the animal *Umwelt*. In recognising this connection, we should not, Heidegger says, be distracted by Uexküll's use of the term *Welt*, which signifies a different understanding of world from the concept that Heidegger develops throughout Part One.¹⁰⁷ The crucial point for Heidegger is not simply the fact that Uexküll makes use of the concept of 'world' in his analysis, or that he does so as part of a comparative analysis of different species, envisaging organisms as confined to environments that differ in their scope. Rather, Heidegger is interested in the manner in which Uexküll responds to the impasse between mechanism and vitalism by going right back to the question of the ontological distinctions that are implicit in biology and that reveal the contemporary understanding of the concept of life.

Heidegger insists that, in formulating the theory of the *Umwelt*, Uexküll 'means nothing other than what we have characterised as the disinhibiting ring' of the animal.¹⁰⁸ Heidegger thus understands his own formulation of the structure of animality to be a direct representation of Uexküll's, one that renders explicit the metaphysical conception of animality contained within it. Heidegger's argument here is that, if we attempt to uncover the fundamental presuppositions of *Umwelt* theory, we will be left with the idea that the animal is always tied to a world, and that the structure and scope of this world, along with its morphology, determine and restrict whatever stimuli are made apparent to it. Heidegger describes this restriction as poverty: as a level of receptivity to a particular set of stimuli at the expense of all other entities. The animal is thus described as 'poor in world'. Given the nature of Heidegger's metaphysical project in the lecture course, his formulation of the animal thesis is therefore unsurprising. The thesis is scientifically informed, and entirely in keeping with early twentieth-century biology's own ontological curiosity about the being of the organism. In this sense, the thesis is not Heidegger's own distinct formulation, despite the fact that he

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 263).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

uses it positively to draw our attention to the naive metaphysical attitude with which we comprehend distinctions between beings.

Heidegger formulates the thesis as part of his pursuit of the contemporary life/spirit division for the purpose of coming to understand the landscape and delusions of contemporary metaphysics. If we closely examine the passages containing Heidegger's reflections on life, we see that his own voice in this investigation is suppressed:

The animal's *way of being*, which we call 'life', is *not without access* to what is around it and about it, to that amongst which it appears as a living being. It is because of this that the claim arises that the animal has an environmental world of its own within which it moves.¹⁰⁹

Here Heidegger claims, first and foremost, to be describing an approach that belongs to the 'cutting edge' of contemporary biology, rather than, as Derrida et al. believe, importing his own theory of animality. Heidegger insists that his claim about the confined environmental world of the animal is one that 'arises' in biology, where it is crystallised in the work of Baer, Driesch, and Uexküll. His use of the term 'poverty' is intended to foreground the metaphysical commitments of these scientists, but we can easily find explicit articulation of it in Uexküll's writing. Uexküll's famous example of the *Umwelt* of the tick, in which he describes the structure of the tick's surrounding world as 'impoverished', can be read as an account of an extreme version of world-poverty:

From the enormous world surrounding the tick, three stimuli glow like signal lights in the darkness and serve as directional signs that lead the tick surely to its target. In order to make this possible the tick has been given, beyond its body receptors and effectors, three perception signs, which it can use as features. Through these features, the progression of the tick's actions is so strictly prescribed that the tick can only produce very determinate effect marks.

The whole rich world surrounding the tick is constricted and transformed into an impoverished structure that, most importantly of all, consists only of three features and effect marks—the tick's environment. However, the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., §47, p. 198.

poverty of this environment is needful for the certainty of action, and certainty is more important than riches.¹¹⁰

Insofar as it takes Heidegger to be laying out his own theory of animality in Part Two of *FCM*, the standard reading assumes that all language of deprivation belongs to Heidegger's own establishment of the idea of the impoverished surrounding world of the animal, that Heidegger himself has posited a terrain of narrow stimuli encircling the animal, beyond which entities are meaningless for it. Aside from the general manner in which it ignores the wider metaphysical context of *FCM*, there are two specific dimensions to this failure in the standard reading. First, as already indicated, this reading ignores the derivative character of Heidegger's claims in Part Two of *FCM*, and does not recognise their context in the history of the concept of animal worlds that stems from Herder through Baer and into Uexküll's work. Secondly, the standard reading wrongly assumes that the concept of a structure of stimuli encircling animals, out of which the concept of world-poverty emerges, is one that derogates animality, and entails an evaluative scale of beings. In Uexküll's tick example, the tick's environing world, though it is 'impoverished', is a world of acute 'certainty', a certainty that other more complex creatures forgo. There is a direct link drawn in the example between poverty and security. The groundwork for this idea of a link between destitution and positive organic traits was established, as I have already indicated, in Herder's speculations regarding advantages that develop within simplistic organismic structures:

The bee in its hive builds with the wisdom that *Egeria* could not teach her *Numa*; but beyond these cells and beyond its destined occupation in these cells the bee is also nothing. The spider weaves with the art of Minerva; but all its art is also woven out in this narrow spinning-space; that is its world! How marvellous is the insect, and how narrow the circle of its effect!¹¹¹

Once again, context is everything when it comes to comprehending Heidegger's reflections concerning animality. The claim that Heidegger's analysis devalues animal life appears problematic, first, when we consider that Heidegger discusses biology in order further to reveal the metaphysical preoccupations of profound boredom, an attunement that produces

¹¹⁰ Uexküll (2010 [1934]: 51).

¹¹¹ Herder (2002 [1772]: 78).

compelling delusions that compensate for inability to be 'gripped' by beings. His aim is not to produce a novel theoretical biology. Secondly, if we look at the trajectory in comparative anatomy that prefaces Uexküll's work and Heidegger's appropriation of it, we see that there is a sense in which this comparative approach queries rather than simply reinforces classical, flatly hierarchical ways of stratifying beings. The image of animal life that emerges from this Herderian-inspired phase in the history of biology is one in which the animal is safeguarded from the contingency and indeterminacy of human life. To adopt Heideggerian vocabulary, animal life is not determined by a thrownness into world that exposes it to multiple possibilities, including the ultimate and most radical possibility of death. Rather, the animal is intimate with the resources of its environment, held fast to a space to which it is adapted, and which it always already knows how to navigate.

The implications of my argument for this rereading of Part Two of *FCM* is that, if we take the lecture course as a whole rather than jump to the few pages where Heidegger outlines his three theses, we can see that the theses play a relatively minor role in the overall context of the lecture course. This metaphysical context, which foreshadows Heidegger's comparative examination, is more revealing and important than the question concerning the extent to which the comparative tradition in biology that Heidegger examines is guilty of valorising or derogating animal life. The critical point to bear in mind, I wish to argue, is the fact that Heidegger is attempting to engage us with the metaphysical suppositions and prejudices that knit together the contemporary anthropological optic through which we encounter ourselves and our place in the world. The three theses are intended to express these prejudices and presuppositions, so it is no wonder that they appear to do precisely that.

The aim of this chapter has been to show that Heidegger's animal thesis is posited in the light of, rather than in spite of, the findings of biology. His comparative examination aims to articulate fundamental biological principles concerning the structure of the organism, which gained impact following Darwin. His description of the animal as restricted to specific environment—an environment that is attenuated in accordance with the specificity of its impulses—is embedded in the suppositions of the comparative ethology of his time. The specific formulation of the thesis is essentially the progeny of the theoretical biology that attempted to advance beyond mechanism and vitalism, and to address what it considered to be explanatory gaps in Darwinism. The breadth of this history within biology complicates the contention expressed by Derrida that Heidegger's key ambition is

first and foremost to emphasise human separateness, and that he has invented a comparative method of analysis to achieve this result. If we attend to the history of biology, we see that Heidegger's claims in *FCM* are notable, not as isolated attempts to preserve an ontotheological account of human uniqueness, but rather for their articulation of the metaphysical architecture that prevailed during this phase in the history of the life sciences.

Introducing the Move from Life to Spirit

I have argued that Heidegger posits his three theses as part of a broad metaphysical agenda—namely, to understand the metaphysical assumptions and delusions that ground the contemporary epoch and to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and role of the concept of 'life' as one of the key principles of the epoch. Heidegger discovers this concept in its most metaphysically lucid form in Uexküll's work. In his defence of the concept of the world of the animal, Uexküll provides a challenging appraisal of the trends in thinking that are *de rigueur* in contemporary biology, an appraisal that exposes the inheritance of the contemporary understanding of life. Heidegger considers Uexküll's research in this area to be metaphysically significant insofar as it leads to the realisation that life disrupts the categories that are ascribed to machines and to inert matter. According to this Uexküllian view, Heidegger says, the dynamic relationship between the animal and its environment, the sphere into which it incorporates aspects of the world that are relevant for it, reveals the '*intrinsically dominant character of living beings amongst beings in general*, an intrinsic elevation [*Erhabenheit*] of nature over itself, a sublimity that is lived in life itself'.¹¹² According to Heidegger, the fact that Uexküll makes this very point and does so emphatically qualifies him as one of the clearest articulators of the implicit metaphysical commitments of contemporary biology. Heidegger's contention is that, by studying Uexküll's findings, we can reach a deeper understanding of life as one of the two categories that dominate our engagement with entities and with ourselves. Uexküll's work takes us to the cusp of what biology is capable of, and, in so doing, reveals the limitations of biology.¹¹³

¹¹² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §66, p. 278).

¹¹³ Ibid., §61b), p. 263.

Heidegger thus champions Uexküll as a radical biologist who understands the conceptual limitations of biology. In Uexküll's biology, he locates an Aristotelian holism that he finds far more illuminating than the instrumental conception of the organism. The idea that our understanding of the animal must also accommodate its environment, not as something added on, but as something that it always already accesses, corresponds to the Aristotelian conception of the soul laid out in *De Anima*. The soul is not an isolable property of the living entity that can be found inside it, one that serves a particular end, but is rather an end in itself, what McNeill describes as the 'primary entelechy of the living body'.¹¹⁴ For Uexküll, the animal's relation to its *Umwelt* is likewise something that essentially belongs to its structure, not as an instrument that brings about particular ends, but as an intrinsic part of its being. David Storey claims that the presence of Uexküll in various aspects of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle is clear: 'Heidegger suggests that Aristotle, somewhat like Uexküll, sees the soul as the power or potential for comportment toward a world, as a kind of intentionality'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, for Heidegger, Uexküll's analysis gets far closer to the original Aristotelian ethos of biology, an ethos that has been entirely obscured by mechanism. Biology, Heidegger says, 'has long been acquainted with the discipline called ecology. The word ecology derives from *oikos*, the Greek word for house. It signifies the investigation of where and how animals are at home in the world, of the way in which they live in relation to their environment'.¹¹⁶ At the heart of the mechanistic approach is a misconstrued interpretation of the role of biology, which has its roots in Darwinism. For, within Darwinism, Heidegger says, the idea of the relation of an animal to its environment was

understood in an external manner in light of the question concerning adaptation. In Darwinism such investigations were based upon the fundamentally misconceived idea that the animal is present at hand, and then subsequently adapts itself to a world that is present at hand, that it then comports itself accordingly and that the fittest individual gets selected.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ McNeill (2006: 15).

¹¹⁵ Storey (2013: 172).

¹¹⁶ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 263.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

The force of this Darwinian perspective is responsible for what Uexküll describes as a suppression of the fundamental knowledge that an animal is a subject in possession of a world of its own.¹¹⁸

Thanks to his loyalty to the original ecological ethos of biology, Uexküll's work illuminates and delimits the field of biology as a study of the organism's relation to its environment, to its 'home'. If the organism is to be understood first and foremost as an opening onto an environment, as an entity that, to a greater or lesser extent, is capable of taking in a 'world' of its own, then world necessarily becomes a decisive concept in the metaphysics that underpins biology. The outcome of Heidegger's analysis of biology is therefore the idea that the full scope of the contemporary concept of 'life', a concept that has undergone various mutations since Aristotle, is captured in Uexküll's use of the concept of the 'world' of the animal.

However, Uexküll's concept of the world of the organism runs out of steam at a very specific point—namely, the point at which we begin to question the human being. If we try to extend the model of the *Umwelt* to include human beings, the 'whole approach', Heidegger says, becomes 'philosophically problematic'.¹¹⁹ Uexküll observes a correlation between the complexity of an animal and the breadth and richness of its world. Uexküll's tick has sharp senses but a narrow world, whereas more complex creatures will be able to take in a wider range of stimuli. Is the human being simply an example of a complex organism with an extended *Umwelt* or wide range of *Umwelten*? According to Heidegger, if we approach the human using Uexküll's theory, we find that, despite being an ostensibly 'complex' living entity, it is notably lacking in any specific environment or set of environments, as well as in correlative fine-tuned perceptual organs.¹²⁰ Heidegger suggests here that, for the Uexküllian model, the human therefore represents something of a problem. We cannot understand the morphology and functioning of the human organism using Uexküllian principles if we have to dispense with the concept of the *Umwelt*, understood as a 'stabilizing, species-specific enclosure bubble' in the case of the human.¹²¹ This seems like a bold, biologically under-explored implication, and it could be argued that human beings have multiple environments rather than none in particular. However, for Heidegger, the key point—one that, as Chapter 6

¹¹⁸ Uexküll (1926: 204).

¹¹⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 263.

¹²⁰ To illustrate this point, Heidegger invites us to compare the falcon's highly 'discriminatory' visual capacity over our own comparatively weak visual organs (*ibid.*, §46, p. 194).

¹²¹ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, 'Afterword', in Uexküll (2010 [1934]: 220).

explores, finds empirical development in the philosophical anthropology of his day—is that, when it comes to human existence, it is ‘world’, rather than ‘environmental niche’ or range of niches, that is the appropriate concept to apply to the mode and manner of human inhabitation.¹²²

If the human exists in the absence of an *Umwelt*, and, at the same time, lacks the kind of acute sensory organs that wire non-human animals directly into their specific environmental niches, it would appear that, on entering the world, the human is confronted with a barrage of stimuli, what William James describes as a ‘blooming buzzing confusion’.¹²³ The world of the human is regarded as entirely distinct from the encircling environment of the animal, in which various relevant stimuli ‘glow like signal lights’. From the point at which Uexküll’s research reaches its limit—the point at which we arrive at the conceptual walls that surround biology—we can thus catch a glimpse of the terrain of entities that it does not explain. In other words, the field of beings that has now emerged in opposition to life is that of the human world: language, reason, all those peculiarly human capacities that, since the human is not a straightforward organism embedded in an *Umwelt*, tend to be accounted for in terms of ‘spirit’. Heidegger has already argued in Part One that this second terrain of beings is presupposed, in the contemporary age, by philosophers of culture, ‘diagnosticians’ whose ‘anthropological’ attempts to define the human end up diverting attention away from it. Just as mechanism seeks explanations for life by looking away from living beings towards machines, Heidegger argues that anthropology attempts to define ‘man’ by looking away from that which is essentially human and propagating delusions concerning man’s being as a life–spirit composite. Having provided an exposition of the ‘life’ side of this contemporary delusion in this chapter, I will turn in Chapter 6 to Heidegger’s claims concerning the concept of ‘spirit’ by looking in more detail at the various manifestations of the anthropological worldview that he began to critique in Part One of *FCM*.

¹²² Despite this empirical support from philosophical anthropology, Heidegger remains deeply sceptical of the discipline and refuses to draw on it explicitly. The following chapters will explore his reasons for this rejection.

¹²³ James (2007 [1890]: 488).

6

From Life to Spirit

The Human World

Heidegger's Analysis of 'World-Formation'

My intention, up until this point, has been to reveal a deficit at the heart of the standard conception of Heidegger's reflections on animals in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (*FCM*) by examining the rich metaphysical context that surrounds and informs his comparative examination of animal life. In Chapter 5 I aimed to demonstrate that, though Derrida, Krell, et al. find Heidegger's engagement with biology so controversial, this engagement in fact amounts to a careful, even-handed exposition of the biology of the time. A closer look at the metaphysical suppositions of Jakob von Uexküll et al. reveals that Heidegger is really commentating on biological developments rather than trying to project his own idiosyncratic prejudices onto biology. Early twentieth-century biology produces taxonomies that are based on the concept of a spectrum of animal worlds. The concept of world-poverty is not imported into or projected onto biology but is instead read off it. I now wish to turn my attention to Heidegger's final thesis. What does he mean when he claims that the human is 'world-forming'?

Heidegger's discussion of his second thesis resulted in the observation that the animal has an instinctual awareness of the objects it apprehends. The worker bee, he says, is 'familiar' with the colour and scent of the blossom it seeks out, but 'knows nothing' of other parts of the plant.¹ The human, by contrast, experiences the plant 'as such' and 'as a whole'. There is an 'extendability of everything [the human] relates to'.² Along with this possibility of detached, extendable, circumspective experience, which is beyond mere acquaintance or familiarity, there is the possibility, for human beings, of '*attending to*' beings in a particular way.³ The relationship

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §46, p. 193).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., §64, p. 274.

between the human and the 'manifestness' of these beings has the character of 'attending to':

[A]ttending to [...] whatever is encountered in the sense of *letting it be* or *not letting it be*. Only where there is such a letting be do we find at the same time the possibility of not letting be. Such a relation to something, which is thoroughly governed by this letting be of something as a being, we are calling *comportment* [*Verhalten*], in distinction from the behaviour of captivation.⁴

Where the animal is captivated, confined to a disinhibiting ring, the human comports itself towards beings *as* beings. Comportment and 'stance' (*Haltung*) are only a possibility for those beings that have a self-like character, 'or, as we also say, [the character] of a person'.⁵

Heidegger lays out three characteristics of the phenomenon of world as accessed by the human being: (1) the manifestness of beings as beings, (2) what he terms the 'as' structure, and (3) the relation to beings as 'letting be and not letting be', which also depends upon the capacity to take a stance towards something and on an enduring selfhood.⁶ 'Nothing of this kind', he claims, 'is to be found in animality or in life in general'.⁷ This analysis establishes the groundwork for further elucidation of the ontological abyss between Dasein and animality. As Heidegger began to emphasise in his analysis of animality, the fact that the human has a different kind of access to world does not have an evaluative implication, nor does this observation debunk biological descriptions of the human.⁸ It would be incorrect to assume that animals do not possess any degree of openness within their encircling rings. There is immense variety in the habitats and behavioural dispositions found in the animal kingdom. The encircling ring of the sea urchin differs from that of the great tit or the squirrel. However, despite these differences, encircling rings overlap and sometimes encapsulate one another. As the woodpecker hunts the worm, it 'finds itself in all this within the ring encircling the squirrel which startles it as it works'.⁹ Encircling rings contain within them a wealth of possibilities for action and interrelation with the encircling rings of other creatures. However, this abundance of possibilities is 'still fundamentally different from the manifestness of beings as encountered in the world-forming Dasein of man'.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., §46, p. 194.

⁹ Ibid., §66, p. 277.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In §67 Heidegger attempts further to elucidate the content of this claim. The accessibility of beings is one characteristic of world, but this characteristic does not determine the 'essence' of world, for accessibility is always 'grounded in possible manifestness'.¹¹ World refers, then, to the actual 'manifestness of those beings that are factically manifest in each case'.¹² For Heidegger, the manifestness of beings is not anything like an ontic property, such as the hardness of a stone. Manifestness is 'something that [...] occurs *with* beings themselves'.¹³ The human is the being for whom beings are made manifest. But when and how, Heidegger asks, does this manifestness occur? 'Is world first formed in each case, so that we can talk of world-formation' and declare the human to be world-forming?¹⁴ In order to address these questions, Heidegger claims that we must clarify the phenomenon of world-formation 'simply in terms of the essence of man, corresponding to the way in which we examined our second thesis'.¹⁵ He acknowledges that this appears to be the logical step forward: to turn once again to ontic science—this time to anthropology—to seek support and clarification of his statement: 'Just as we asked about animality before, so we now ask about humanity and its essence, and just as we drew upon biology and zoology for support before, so we can now draw upon anthropology'.¹⁶ However, Heidegger swiftly rejects this as a way to proceed:

In this case we would be entering a large, multifarious, and indeed confused domain of problems, theses, and standpoints. We should have to wind our way through all this and would only fulfil our purpose with the greatest of effort. It would require a wearisome preparation in asking what man is.¹⁷

The key problem here, he says, is that 'when we ask about the essence of man we are asking about *ourselves*'.¹⁸ We are not looking out into nature and observing other beings, we are asking about the being that each of us is. Answers cannot therefore be found in the disciplines of anthropology and psychology, which attempt to proceed without appreciating this methodological complexity.¹⁹ Heidegger responds with the enigmatic solution that the enquiry should instead be grounded in an attempt to understand 'the Dasein' of the human being, which 'always already intrinsically brings the truth about itself along with it'.²⁰ He notes that, prior to his long

¹¹ Ibid., §67, p. 280.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. 280–1.

¹⁸ Ibid. 281.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

examination of biology, the concept of world-formation was elaborated via his discussion of the fundamental attunement of profound boredom. This fundamental attunement exposed *Dasein*'s disposition to gain a 'grip' on the world and make it meaningful, which is placed in stark contrast to the moodless animal. Thanks to this analysis of fundamental attunement, Heidegger says, the lectures can 'forego a discussion of anthropology'.²¹

So Heidegger rejects the ontic-scientific, anthropological contribution to his discussion wholesale and instead delves into the metaphysical complexities of the concept of world, world-formation, and the distinction between them. He claims in §68 that world 'forms itself, and world only is what it is in such formation', which implies that the phenomenon of world 'belongs' first and foremost to world-formation.²² And yet, in §64, he suggests that 'that manifestness of beings as such, of beings *as* beings, belongs to world', that '[o]nly where beings are manifest *as* beings *at all*, do we find the possibility of experiencing this or that particular being as determined in this or that particular way'.²³ It is the capacity to experience beings *as* what they are that belongs to the human, and is refused to the animal. So what role does the human play in the formation of world, if the condition of the possibility of its experience lies with the possibility of the manifestness of being? Heidegger insists that it would be misguided to think of the human as a being that, while going about its various activities, also decides to form a world. Rather, he insists once again it is the '*Da-sein in man*', and not the human as a particularly sophisticated kind of animal, that is world-forming, and it is this '*Da-sein*' that requires further elucidation.²⁴

From the perspective of evolutionary biology, the human is thought of as a primate with specialised cognitive capacities for self-reflection, non-reflexive decision-making, and memory, which distinguish it to a degree from less complex creatures. The operation of these aptitudes is not what Heidegger has in mind when he claims that the human, unlike the animal, is world-forming. Rather, the claim indicates that the human's entire being is possible only on the basis of world-formation. McNeill describes this characterisation of the human in the following way: 'The distinctive self-relation of human life, the ability to be (to dwell in) a relation to one's own Being, presupposes an "ekstatic" Being-outside-itself of our very Being, an ekstasis that is possible only as a relation to the phenomenon of world'.²⁵ World-formation is what 'first enables our very Being, our self-understanding and

²¹ Ibid. 282.

²² Ibid. 285.

²³ Ibid., §64, p. 274.

²⁴ Ibid., §68, p. 285.

²⁵ McNeill (2006: pp. xi-xii).

ability to relate to ourselves as beings that are already manifest'.²⁶ It is via attunement, Heidegger says, that Dasein 'becomes manifest to itself in such and such a manner'.²⁷ Attunement 'sets us ourselves before beings as a whole. In attunement we *are* in such and such a way: this therefore implies that attunement precisely makes *beings as a whole* manifest and makes us manifest to ourselves as disposed in the midst of these beings'.²⁸ Attunement, McNeill says in his elaboration of Heidegger's claim, enables 'our very dwelling, our *ēthos*. Even if such an *ēthos* can subsequently be modified by understanding, by *logos* and by deliberation, such understanding nevertheless always remains responsive to an attunement and way of Being that is already given and situated, localised in a particular locale or site of dwelling'.²⁹ McNeill notes that 'the German word for "poverty" in the animal's alleged "poverty in world", namely, *Armut*, implies the lack of a certain kind of *pathos* or attunement, of a certain mood, even of a certain courage or gathering of oneself, of a certain "cheer" or "spirit"—all of which are suggested by the German *Mut*'.³⁰ The moodless animal is not capable of experiencing an entity in the totality of its varying facets and guises, it simply reacts to stimuli within its disinhibiting ring. Moods as vehicles of world-formation, as channels for grasping entities 'as such' and 'as a whole', are therefore superfluous to animal life.

During Heidegger's discussion of the third thesis, world is described as the 'manifestness of beings as such as a whole', a manifestness that the human participates in and that is refused to the animal.³¹ Heidegger dedicates §§69–76 to an analysis of how we should consider the linguistic structure of the 'as such' and 'as a whole' and thereby illuminate further the phenomena of world and world-formation. He begins by claiming that a merely linguistic interpretation will not suffice: 'this "as" is no mere whim of language, but is clearly somehow grounded in the meaning of Dasein itself'.³² The task is thus 'precisely to bring to light that original connection from out of which and for which this "as" has emerged as a specific meaningful coinage'.³³ We interpret the statement 'a is b' to mean 'a, insofar as it is b'.³⁴ What role does the 'as' play here? Heidegger states that an "a" that is "b" is already given and "a" being "b" is explicitly brought out in the

²⁶ Ibid., p. xii.

²⁷ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §68, p. 283).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ McNeill (2006: p. xii).

³⁰ Ibid. 41.

³¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §69a), p. 287).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. 288.

“as”. We already fundamentally know what we mean by this “as” even before we articulate it clearly in language'.³⁵

That which the ‘as’ signifies is something that precedes the simple structure of the proposition and cannot be grasped through a merely linguistic analysis. It is crucial, for Heidegger, that we interrogate precisely what this ‘as-structure’ signifies, because it is at the core of the phenomenon of world as the manifestness of beings as such and as a whole, and thus assists us in our interpretation of his final thesis. Propositional statements about things may be deemed either ‘true’ or ‘false’ depending on whether or not they ‘agree with’ the things they refer to. A statement is considered ‘true’ if it ‘informs us about what a matter is and how it is’.³⁶ This exercise of informing us of something, of disclosing the way in which something is, is due to the fact that the statement ‘contains a *manifestness of the matter itself*’. The structure of the *statement that makes manifest* bears this “as” within itself'.³⁷ The human possibility of disclosing entities as such and as a whole is due to the fact that it is a being who possesses *logos*, which, following Aristotle, Heidegger takes to be an exercise of ‘letting something be seen’, and, correspondingly, of articulating ‘how entities comport themselves’.³⁸ The human being ‘holds himself in a comportment toward other beings, and on the basis of this comportment toward other beings is able to refer to these other beings as such’.³⁹

Heidegger states that the link between the phenomena of world-formation and *logos* enables us to equate his third thesis with the ancient definition of the human being as *zōon logon echon*.⁴⁰ In the second thesis he claimed that the animal, while being open to possibilities within its encircling ring, ‘lacks the ability to apprehend as a being whatever it is open for’.⁴¹ The human, by contrast, possesses ‘a being open for...’, which ‘has the character of *apprehending something as something*’ and of articulating it. This is what is meant by the claim that the human comports itself towards beings, rather than being captivated by them. For Heidegger, the description of the human as world-forming, as the being that participates in the manifestness of beings as such and as a whole, the being that is able to ‘speak out’ about beings, is thus in keeping with the classical interpretation of the human as *zōon logon echon*.⁴² He notes that his analysis of his final thesis

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Heidegger (1962 [1927]: Introduction IIB, p. 57, §44b), p. 262).

³⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §72a), p. 308).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 306.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

thus leads us back to the ancient knowledge that has ostensibly been covered up throughout the history of Western metaphysics:

Thus man is a *ζώον λόγον ἔχον*, whereas the animal is *άλογον*. Despite the fact that our interpretation and way of questioning is altogether different from that of antiquity, it is not saying anything substantially new, but—as always and everywhere in philosophy—purely the same.⁴³

Heidegger's comparative examination has produced a conception of the human world as openness to beings as such and as a whole. The ontological structure of this openness, this 'accessibility', is, he thinks, revealed via his method of comparative analysis. The human world is 'constantly extendable not only in its range (we can always bring more and more beings into consideration) but also in respect to the manner in which we can penetrate ever more deeply in this penetrability'.⁴⁴ The principle of penetrability in this context is the structure of world itself, and the procedure of penetration, of further expanding the scope and depth of world, is what Heidegger means by the term 'world-formation'. This conception of human distinctiveness is not comprehensible, according to Heidegger, from the ontic-scientific perspective of anthropology.

The Conspicuous Absence of Anthropology in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*

This cursory treatment of anthropology is, I think, one of the most problematic controversial aspects of *FCM*. The observation that Heidegger mishandles anthropology rather than biology in the lecture course will form the basis of the remainder of this chapter. If we reject the 'standard' reading of the lectures that I laid out in Chapter 1 on the basis of its misinterpretation of the 'biology sections', a misinterpretation that stems from its disproportionate attentiveness to the comparative examination and corresponding neglect of the wider contents of *FCM*, we will still be faced with a significant problem; a mysterious oversight still remains. However, this oversight is one that is present in the lecture course itself. In Part One, Heidegger eschews anthropology as the parent of all that he is trying to avoid in *FCM*:

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., §46, p. 193.

worldview, *Darstellung*, anthropocentrism, and so on. However, whereas he dedicates four chapters to life and biology, he is finished with anthropology after one or two sentences. Anthropology is described by Heidegger as the underlying mechanism that determines the tenor of all *Kulturphilosophie*.⁴⁵ It is the means by which the contemporary human being has become detached from any confrontation with himself. In many respects, it is the engine of profound boredom. And yet, despite posing a serious threat, this looming adversary does not receive any extended treatment in *FCM* at any stage.

In his brief but forceful dismissal of anthropology, Heidegger attempts to construct an image of the discipline as a field fraught with damaging, derivative, and unthinking metaphysical prejudices concerning the life/spirit dichotomy. Anthropology is perhaps beneath biology in Heidegger's eyes, and is therefore not worth anything more than a quick mention. However, just as biology undergoes an interesting metaphysical sea change in the 1920s as a result of Uexküll's pioneering work, anthropology also enjoys an especially fertile period, one of which Heidegger is well aware⁴⁶ and one that comes about as a result of the developments in biology to which he pays such careful attention to and in which he sees value. Having examined the 'life' side of the life/spirit opposition, Heidegger does not give equal treatment to the 'spirit' side. If we look at the anthropological research that takes place in 1920s Germany, we discover a substantial philosophical tradition comprised of thinkers who make strikingly similar claims to those found in *FCM*.⁴⁷ Heidegger's analysis of Uexküll broaches the outer edge of this research but then abruptly halts, leaving us without any exposition of its vital contents. This neglect of anthropology constitutes a serious omission in the metaphysical history that Heidegger presents. If we supplement Heidegger's lecture course with an analysis of anthropology, we will see that contemporary philosophical anthropology supports his thesis on world-formation, just as biology supports his world-poverty thesis. To take this

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §18c), p. 77.

⁴⁶ In *FCM*, Heidegger (*ibid.*, §18a), p. 70; §45b), p. 192) makes passing reference to the work of Max Scheler, one of the principal figures of the anthropological tradition in 1920s Germany. He also touches on contemporary anthropology in his 1929 lecture course *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Part Four A), and does so more extensively in his 1929 debate with Ernst Cassirer at Davos (see Gordon 2010).

⁴⁷ For further discussion of Heidegger's engagement with German philosophical anthropology, see my chapter 'In Pursuit of Something "Essential" about Man: Heidegger and Philosophical Anthropology', in Honenberger (2015).

step, we first need to go back, once again, to biology and Heidegger's discussion of it.

The outcome of Heidegger's examination of contemporary biology is the idea that, if we look at the deepest deliverances of biology, we will eventually hit upon its limitations. Uexküll's concept of the animal *Umwelt*, illuminating as it is, 'becomes philosophically problematic', Heidegger says, 'if we proceed to talk about the human world in the same manner'.⁴⁸ Heidegger claims that, among biologists, 'Uexküll is the one who has repeatedly pointed out with the greatest emphasis that what the animal stands in relation to is given for it in a different way than it is for the human being. Yet this is precisely the place where the decisive problem lies concealed and demands to be exposed'.⁴⁹ It is on account of the radical and revisionary nature of his work that Uexküll manages, according to Heidegger, to identify and reveal this limitation in biology. As a result of Uexküll's reflections on life, a different assemblage of beings begins to emerge, beings that appear to subvert Uexküll's definition of the organism. This is the region belonging to the human, and it includes all of the human's capacities, such as intellect, reason, and language. According to the metaphysical picture that emerges in biology, and, as we will see, in anthropology, these capacities are not present in *Umwelt*-oriented non-human animals. Because the human does not appear to have any particular *Umwelt*, its survival cannot be accounted for and understood in terms of customary laws of biological adaptation.

Heidegger has argued throughout Part One of *FCM*—from his examination of the *physis/éthos* divide to his analysis of the Apollonian/Dionysian divide in Nietzsche and the subsequent proclamations from *Kulturphilosophie*—that the history of metaphysics has produced a division between life and spirit. The territory that biology does not explain—that is, the nature of the human being—is the territory of 'spirit' according to all of the major characterisations of the contemporary epoch that Heidegger cites in Part One. We can recall that Heidegger uses examples of four 'philosophers of culture', Spengler, Scheler, Ziegler, and Klages, to explicate the manner in which contemporary thought has ossified the divide that it has inherited between life and spirit. These thinkers define the human as embroiled in a drama involving these two dimensions, and, in so doing, they mark a mutation towards a kind of anthropo-biological worldview. Despite their grandiloquent tones and their seductive use of diagnostic accounts of the human's 'place' and 'role in history',

⁴⁸ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §61b), p. 263.

⁴⁹ Ibid., §61b), p. 264.

these thinkers only ever manage a 'setting out' of the human, a *Darstellung* that is developed out of a superficial, external treatment of it. Heidegger claims that, despite aiming to reveal something profound about the 'human condition', Spengler et al. treat the human as the embodiment of the two 'components' of life and spirit, components that, they believe, we can identify and study from afar.⁵⁰ In their attempts to approximate the objectivity and detachment of the sciences, these thinkers fail to 'involve us'.⁵¹ In fact, they serve to 'untie us' from ourselves, and yet do so 'precisely as anthropology'.⁵²

Heidegger's attack on anthropology reads like an inversion of Kant's claim, in his *Lectures on Logic*, that all of the principal questions of philosophy ultimately stem from the foundational 'anthropological' question of what it means to be human.⁵³ For Heidegger, this idea of a reduction to anthropology is understood pejoratively as a failure of thinking. According to his appraisal of contemporary thought in *FCM*, it is in virtue rather than in spite of the fact that Spengler et al. think anthropologically, and produce anthropological theories, that they not only deter but subvert philosophical enquiries into the essence of the human. Heidegger targets Scheler's work as the most salient example of the kind of anthropological worldview that treats the human as a duality of life and spirit, but he has little to say about the content of Scheler's anthropology. Because Heidegger does not specify the anthropological content of Scheler's thought, and simply accuses him of possessing a pervasive anthropological worldview, it is likely that the reader will miss the fact that Scheler's anthropology is a *philosophical* anthropology rather than a cultural, social, or biological anthropology. As such, it is not a branch of ontic science or a segment of *Kulturphilosophie*, but is rather part of a subdiscipline of the tradition of post-Kantian philosophy, a discipline that saw some of its most significant publications in the years just prior to *FCM*.⁵⁴

By critiquing Scheler, Heidegger poses a challenge to the main protagonist of the tradition of philosophical anthropology, but he does not provide us with any detail of the philosophical roots of this tradition. Instead, he simply cites anthropology as a damaging example of the disarticulation of human knowledge and of the exploitation of the life/spirit opposition. One of the most confusing aspects of this omission is that Heidegger anticipates and makes space for an analysis of anthropology in the lecture course.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §18a), p. 71.

⁵¹ Ibid., §18c), p. 75.

⁵² Ibid. 77.

⁵³ Kant (1992 [1800]: 538).

⁵⁴ e.g., Max Scheler (2002 [1928]), and Helmuth Plessner, (2019 [1928]).

Heidegger's aim, after all, is to trace the patterns and categories of thought that dominate contemporary thinking in order to lay bare the metaphysical prejudices that these patterns and categories incorporate, and to retrieve more essential concepts from them. Looking at anthropology, particularly given the metaphysically noxious effect that he ascribes to it, surely belongs within this assessment of the metaphysical landscape and pitfalls of modern thought. Why should anthropology be any less relevant than biology in this context? In the following section I will elaborate the Schelerian anthropology that Heidegger alludes to in more detail. I will then argue that Heidegger's relationship to this anthropology is not as straightforward as he leads us to believe.

German Philosophical Anthropology of the 1920s

Since Heidegger isolates Scheler as the key protagonist in his critique of the anthropological 'worldview', the following discussion of anthropology will be focused around Scheler. However, I will also include a brief look at a pre-Schelerian figure, Johann Gottfried von Herder, who is, in many respects, a progenitor of the field of philosophical anthropology, and a post-Schelerian figure, Arnold Gehlen. Taken together, these three thinkers mark the heritage and development of the core ideas of the discipline, and gaining a perspective on their work will enable me to develop a more detailed understanding of Heidegger's problematic neglect of anthropology in *FCM*.

Herder's pioneering vision for the field of anthropology in the late eighteenth century has a proto-Romantic motivation, one that stems from a scepticism concerning the damaging categorisations of Enlightenment thinking. Taylor claims that, according to Herder and the Romantics, these categorisations 'dissect' and 'objectify' human nature by separating 'soul from body, reason from feeling, reason from imagination, thought from senses, desire from calculation and so on'.⁵⁵ Herder's anthropology attempts to reunify these disparate elements by privileging two essential, coextensive attributes of human beings: reflection (*Besonnenheit*) and language.⁵⁶ These features, Herder claims, are the principal points of distinction between humans and non-human animals, and together they possess a dual significance.⁵⁷ Not only are they the mechanisms that allow the human to

⁵⁵ Taylor (1975: 23).

⁵⁶ Herder (2002 [1772]: 84–5).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

comprehend and articulate external objects and states of affairs; reflection and linguistic utterances also enable the realisation of something essential about the human.⁵⁸ By developing language, human beings bring their own fundamental nature to expression, as well as the fundamental nature of the entities that surround them.⁵⁹ Hence Taylor claims that words, for Herder, 'do not just refer, they are also precipitates of an activity in which the human form of consciousness comes to be'.⁶⁰ Non-human animals, in Herder's view, do not possess this inner impulse for self-realisation through reflection and linguistic expression, because animal life, endowed with the 'perfections' of acute sensory awareness, is not forced into a deliberative space.⁶¹ The composition of the animal world, Herder says, does not call for reflecting and questioning.⁶²

According to Herder, it is the capacity for *Besonnenheit* that unhinges human life from the domain of other living beings. In Chapter 5 I touched on Herder's reflections concerning the sense in which all non-human animals belong to a 'circle' (*Kreis*) within which they behave in accordance with specific environmental triggers.⁶³ Herder argues that human beings, in contrast to animals, are unique in their absence of a circle—that is, in the reflective openness of their lives.⁶⁴ It is not that Herder wishes to deny this openness to animals; it is simply that he does not consider them to need it. Animal life, according to Herder, is constituted by a biological adeptness; the animal is ensconced in its environment and needs to respond only to aspects of its surroundings that stimulate its sensory organs:

[T]he smaller the sphere of animals is, the less they need language. The sharper their senses are, the more their representations are directed at a single thing, the more pull their drives have, then the narrower is the common-understanding in whatever sounds signs, expressions they may make. It is living mechanism, ruling instinct, that speaks and hears there. How little it must speak in order to be heard!⁶⁵

Human beings, on the other hand, possess very meagre biological endowments, and are therefore forced to 'speak in order to be heard'. The human is not keenly receptive to any kind of natural habitat, and consequently it has no choice but to seek an understanding of itself and the world, and to

⁵⁸ Ibid. 127–8.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Taylor (1975: 19).

⁶¹ Herder (2002 [1772]: 128)

⁶² Ibid. 78.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 79.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

establish itself through articulation. Herder thus identifies a reciprocal relation between the human's absence of an environment and its capacity for language and reflection.⁶⁶ The human, Herder says, is estranged from an encircling environment and its senses 'are not sharpened for a single thing; [it] has senses for everything and hence naturally for each *particular* thing weaker and duller senses'.⁶⁷ The human's reflective capacity therefore 'had to express itself immediately when the weaker sensuality and all the poverty of [its] lacks expressed itself. The *instinctless, miserable* creature which came from nature's hands so abandoned was also from the first moment on the *freely active, rational* creature which was destined to help itself, and inevitably had the ability to do so'.⁶⁸ The human's dearth of instinct and subsequent attempt to establish itself in other ways is, for Herder, constitutive of its essential nature. The human's 'centre of gravity, the main direction of [its] soul's efficacies, fell as much on this *understanding*, on *human awareness* [*Besonnenheit*], as with the bee it falls immediately on sucking and building'.⁶⁹ Reflection and language cannot, therefore, be described as discontinuous with nature, since they belong to the human mode of life, however feeble this mode may appear when compared with that of non-human animals. Herder claims that the human being's 'forces' of *Besonnenheit* and language and the organic weaknesses that motivate these forces are 'without comparison or [...] balancing of one against another, [its] nature'.⁷⁰

Landmann describes this Herderian link between morphological weakness and the development of language in the following way:

Since he has no natural points of reference by which to categorise the world, man posits artificial ones himself; only with their help does he succeed in processing the abundance of impressions, which would paralyse him by their strangeness and leave him confused; and thus he makes things 'manageable'. Indeed the main achievement in this regard is done by language [...] Language, by classifying everything under concepts, clears up the overcrowded chaos.⁷¹

For Herder, the manner in which the human uses language to reach out beyond the realm of animality—that is, beyond the domain of ever-flowing stimuli—is essentially the result of a natural destitution on the part of

⁶⁶ Ibid. 128.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 79.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 128.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Landmann (1974: 198).

human beings, not an abstract urge towards understanding and awareness. Human beings do not occupy an intermediary position between God and the animals because of some intrinsically superior feature; the requisite of the human's apparent superiority when it comes to understanding and language is to be found in its 'miserably' feeble organic form.⁷²

The manner in which Herder isolates this structure of the human's organic deficiency and amelioration in the form of *Besonnenheit* and language anticipates Scheler's concern, beginning in the 1920s, with understanding human beings in terms of their distinctive absence of organic specialisation. However, prior to the genesis of Scheler's anthropology, a crucial intermediary development takes place in biology, one that shapes and informs the field of philosophical anthropology in general. This development occurs in Uexküll's theoretical biology, in particular his claim that a picture of organismic function can be achieved only through an examination of animal behaviour, which in turn demands an understanding of the way in which the animal relates to its *Umwelt*. The variation in the complexity of different animal species is likewise best described in terms of the varying range of relevant environmental triggers available to them in their *Umwelten*. This research empirically furnishes Herder's earlier comparative anthropological analysis based on the notion of the 'circle' of different animal species and its conspicuous absence in the case of the human. From the start of his inquiry, Herder insists that human existence lacks an environmental circle. Uexküll, on the other hand, seems more agnostic about the question of the human's possession of an *Umwelt*.⁷³ This precise question prefaces Scheler's and Gehlen's work, and the twentieth-century German tradition of philosophical anthropology generally. In taking up this line of enquiry, the philosophical anthropologists of the 1920s observe that the human does not appear to exhibit fully determined organic traits, but instead seems to incorporate, in its very physiology, a kind of insecurity. The philosophical anthropologists, as Landmann says, entirely revise Enlightenment concepts of subjectivity as well as the orthodox categories, rules, and methods of biological analysis, with the result that the human is understood as a being that forgoes the organic drives of other animals:

⁷² Herder (2002 [1772]: 128).

⁷³ The extent to which Uexküll considers the human being to be in possession of an *Umwelt* is debatable. For a discussion of this matter, see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, 'Afterword', in Uexküll (1926).

Man [...] has no instincts—let this exaggeration be allowed for the sake of clarity. Nature does not say how he is to behave in a given situation. With the help of his own reflection he must determine his behaviour independently, he must decide on his own how he will use the world and get along in it. He does not merely react to it, he acts upon it. But to do this he must know the world. He must have deeply penetrating and objective experience of it, as comprehensive as possible, in order to shape his behaviour according to the measure of this experience. Therefore his knowledge has a completely different and broader mission in the total economy of his life than the animals' knowledge has for them. It must not only discover signals and release mechanisms but also establish a much richer relationship to reality; it must not only select a sector of the world but also bring the world to as adequate a realisation as possible.⁷⁴

In keeping with this approach, Scheler observes, by means of a comparative analysis similar to that employed by Herder, a disconnect between the human organism and its environment. Scheler coins the term 'world-openness' (*Weltoffenheit*) to describe the human's lack of adaptation to any specific natural habitat, and its corresponding reduction of organic instincts. This organic deficit is depicted by Scheler as a condition for the possibility of the human's 'higher' forms of development.⁷⁵ Scheler accounts for the human's uncanny 'detachability' from nature by invoking the concept of 'spirit'.⁷⁶ It is only as a 'spiritual' being that the human is able to interpret, understand, and express itself, to determine a position and role for itself.⁷⁷ In this regard, the human quite literally 'organises' itself. The principle of spirit, Scheler says, is 'opposed to life as such, even to life in man'.⁷⁸ As a spiritual being, the human forgoes the sharp biotic aptitude enjoyed by other animals. The human's distinct capacities—for example, its use of tools, intellect, and the way in which it develops culture—must be regarded, according to Scheler, as compensations. The tool, Scheler says, when 'looked at from a vital standpoint, is *not* to be regarded [...] as a sign of a *positive development* of life creating organs. It is rather the expression and consequence of a vital lack'.⁷⁹ The ability to develop biologically supererogatory faculties that are not found among non-human animals

⁷⁴ Landmann (1974: 192).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Scheler (1978: 191).

⁷⁹ Scheler (1978: 191).

⁷⁶ Scheler (2002 [1928]: 52).

can only arise when the power to produce organs, and the capacity for vital development has *exhausted* itself in principle, or when the natural powers of attack and of overcoming other animals or of handling the environment by organs has itself proven to be so weak that only the method of deception is left to overcome this weakness.⁸⁰

When considered in this way, intellect and tool use appear, Scheler says, to be 'pitiable surrogates for new organ development'.⁸¹

Scheler attempts to ward off concern over the metaphysically loaded character of the term 'spirit' by rejecting the definition of spirit as a 'stage of life', a category found at the top of a hierarchical *scala naturae*.⁸² Rather, the term spirit is used to denote the human's relationship to 'world', the 'world-openness' that is the result of its freedom from an organic niche. Gehlen appropriates certain aspects of this idea, setting Scheler's comparative physiology and Herder's Romantic vision of anthropology into a more richly empirical, morphological context. But, ultimately, Gehlen entirely rejects all language of 'spirituality'. For Gehlen, the anthropological definition of the human need not appeal to a metaphysical or spiritual detachment from the natural domain and can be explained solely in terms of the human's distinct morphology.⁸³ Gehlen claims that, in comparison to the great apes, with their 'overdeveloped arms for swinging, feet designed for climbing, body hair, and powerful canine teeth—man appears to be hopelessly unadapted' and must be 'characterised by a singular lack of biological means'.⁸⁴

Where other animals slot neatly into a habitat, there exists an irreducible gap between the human and the environment. Gehlen argues that the human being quite literally embodies this gap; it is incorporated into the configuration of its organism. In the human, a 'hiatus' is created between impulses and action, which 'opens up the possibility of an "inner life" for the human being', a reflective space that is felt when the human is in a state of 'complete rest', detached from any active engagement with its surroundings.⁸⁵ There is thus a space for reflection—for *Besonnenheit*—built into the morphology of human beings with the effect that, unlike animal impulses, human impulses are plastic and open. This structure, Gehlen argues, 'is necessary for an acting being who must exist within the open abundance of the world, responding to whatever situation it may encounter by forming

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Scheler (2002: 52).

⁸³ Gehlen (1988 [1940]: 9).

⁸⁴ Gehlen (2002: 63).

⁸⁵ Gehlen (1988 [1940]: 333, 335).

expectations dictated by experience'.⁸⁶ Because the human domain is one of cautious reflection and 'suspenseful alertness', humans are 'denied the direct gratification [...] that an animal enjoys' and must 'confront the world and its constant surprises and render it available, knowable, intimately familiar and usable'.⁸⁷ The human being's attempt to structure a meaningful world for itself is, for Gehlen, a visceral need that pertains to its morphological 'incompleteness' and subsequent instability. Gehlen claims that this description of the human as 'not yet determined' has two important implications.⁸⁸ First, 'it is yet undetermined exactly what man is; second, the human being is somehow "unfinished," not firmly established'.⁸⁹

Human morphology, for the philosophical anthropologists, thus incorporates an 'organisational principle' quite distinct from that of other creatures.⁹⁰ By using its own initiative, Gehlen says, the human must transform its weaknesses into opportunities for survival. The human being uses its detachment from the demands of physical stimuli to gain an interpretative distance, out of which it can 'develop an understanding of [itself]'.⁹¹ Nature has thus

accorded a special position to man, or—to put it differently—in man she has pursued a unique, hitherto untrodden path of development; she has created a new organisational principle. A consequence of this principle is that man's existence poses a difficult problem; his survival becomes his greatest challenge and greatest accomplishment.⁹²

Gehlen argues that the interpretation of the human as just another part of nature is, therefore, 'scientifically ambiguous', precisely because, as Scheler has already noted, the attributes that enable human survival are attributes that run counter to the 'natural' order of evolutionary development.

Why should nature have produced a creature with such scanty physical means? When approaching this question, Gehlen states that we must consider the problems that the human being faces as 'part of [its] very existence' and not as aberrations.⁹³ The human has a tenuous relationship with nature to the extent that its very physiology is tenuous. It has none of the strength or keenness of senses characteristic of other animals, and yet it is able to propagate in any environment on earth, live longer than any other mammal,

⁸⁶ Ibid. 336.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 238.

⁸⁸ Gehlen (2002: 60).

⁸⁹ Ibid. 60–1.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 61.

⁹¹ Ibid. 65.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. 60.

and develop culture and institutions. In other words, is capable of somehow harnessing the waywardness of the world and enabling its own survival.

Unravelling Heidegger's Rejection of Anthropology

Does this brief exposition of some core principles in philosophical anthropology serve to corroborate Heidegger's claim that anthropology, philosophical or otherwise, is simply another form of contemporary *Darstellung*? For Heidegger the answer, of course, is 'yes', but his minimal comments concerning anthropology in *FCM* require some unravelling if we are to clarify the reasons behind his wholesale rejection of the discipline.

According to Heidegger, any attempt to absolve philosophical anthropology of the charge that it is a form of representation founded on derivative and unquestioned concepts of life and spirit will be misguided. For it is impossible to explain away the fact that, as the progeny of a fixed anthropological worldview, philosophical anthropology, like all branches of anthropology, begins with the premature supposition that the human is a biological entity, an ape.⁹⁴ Despite the fact that it claims philosophical as well as scientific origins, philosophical anthropology remains armed with this restrictive definition. For Heidegger, its reliance upon the definition of the human as a kind of ape debars philosophical anthropology from engaging with the activity of philosophising.

We can recall that Heidegger's aim in *FCM* is to defend the idea that philosophy, as the activity that arises from and articulates the openness and fundamental negativity of *Dasein*—its homesickness and vulnerability to all of the contingencies of its existence—is the ultimate, constitutively human activity. To understand that which is 'essentially' human is to understand the activity of philosophising and vice versa. To this extent, it is the *articulation of the question* of what it means to be human, rather than a positive definition of the human as a particular type of living species, that enables us to catch a glimpse of the essence of the human. As Heidegger remarks in the *Preliminary Appraisal*, given the necessarily vertiginous, encircling, 'perilously' ambiguous movement of philosophy, it is only when one is prepared to make oneself vulnerable to the dizziness of this ambiguity that one is capable of glimpsing the 'centre' of the circle, of fully

⁹⁴ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §43, p. 179).

entering into the exercise of philosophising, and therefore of comprehending the essence of human existence.⁹⁵ Beistegui claims that, insofar as the openness that engenders philosophising as the essence of the human is something in excess of the idea of the human being as a living species, discovering anything ‘essential’ about the human is not an anthropological task.⁹⁶ The ‘essence’ of the human, in this sense, ‘is itself nothing human’—that is, nothing hominid-like.⁹⁷ Definitions of the human that are based on the idea that the human being is a primate among other primates have already presupposed an answer to the question of what the human being is. This approach, according to Heidegger, precludes any recognition of the essence of the human being as philosophising, as a metaphysical being. It fails to realise, as Beistegui says, that this essence ‘exceeds’ the human’s organic form. The anthropological outlook does not, therefore, expose us to the ambiguity of our being and the coextensive ambiguity of philosophy. Instead, it shields us from the ‘attack’ of this more essential knowledge:

[I]n the philosophical concept [*Begriff*], man, and indeed man as a whole, is in the *grip of an attack* [Angriff]—driven out of everydayness and driven back into the ground of things. Yet the attacker is not man [...] Rather *in philosophising the Da-sein in man launches an attack upon man*. Thus man in the ground of his essence is someone in the grip of an attack, attacked by the fact ‘that he is what he is’, and already caught up in all comprehending questioning. Yet being comprehensively included in this way is not some blissful awe, but the struggle against the insurmountable ambiguity of all questioning and being.⁹⁸

In the very pursuit of that which is essentially and constitutively human, we have therefore already surpassed the boundaries of anthropology, because we have broken away from the domain of the ‘natural’ and opened ourselves up to concerns that go beyond the simple biological matter of the survival of our species. We have opened ourselves up to the ‘abyssal’ question of existence as such, to knowledge of the human as an ‘originary openness to a constitutive and non-human otherness’, openness to beings, to *physis*.⁹⁹ It is the propensity for this type of openness, which is a requisite for *all* methods of determining the kind of being that the human is, that interests Heidegger. The question of the essence of the human is contained within

⁹⁵ Ibid. 180.

⁹⁶ Beistegui (2003: 13).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §7, p. 21).

⁹⁹ Beistegui (2003: 13).

this broader enquiry concerning *physis* and the human's relationship to it, which is ultimately an enquiry into the essence of metaphysics. This fundamental level of philosophical questioning, Heidegger says, necessarily comes '*prior* to all philosophical anthropology and cultural philosophy'.¹⁰⁰ It is on this basis that he claims that Scheler's anthropology, which he sees as a fixed series of received presuppositions concerning the human being as a unity of life and spirit, must 'deny' Scheler 'any access to metaphysics'.¹⁰¹

Aside from attacking the conceptual origins of anthropology, Heidegger ascribes a general anthropocentrism to the methodology of the discipline. Buchanan describes the founding aim of philosophical anthropology as an attempt to "return" humans back into the context of nature without necessarily naturalizing them'.¹⁰² Though this vision claims to denounce anthropocentric biases, for Heidegger it is already operating at the whim of an implicit, and therefore all the more worrying, anthropocentrism. This is because the anthropological approach assumes that we already know so much about what a human being is, including the boundaries that circumscribe our kind of being, that we can lift human existence from whatever context we find it in and reinsert it into a 'natural' setting. This notion is entirely opposed to Heidegger's claim that, from our own contingent human perspective, embedded in the nature that the sciences try to comprehend, we cannot possibly demand the detached, circumspective certainty that would allow us scientifically to delimit and positively to define our species.¹⁰³ Though philosophical anthropology attempts to draw on and unify the findings of different disciplines in order to construct a complete description of the human, it remains, according to Heidegger, indebted to a culturally embedded emphasis on the life/spirit distinction. It is a product of, rather than a remedy for, the disaggregation of knowledge about human beings that has been underway since antiquity.

These critical points encapsulate Heidegger's hostility to anthropology, but they do not explain why we are not offered any analysis of the discipline in *FCM*. If Heidegger wishes to reject the philosophical anthropology so entirely, this surely calls for some critical engagement with it in order to assure his audience that anthropology is an aberrant path, and that his own approach is different and preferable. He does not see any profound affiliation between biology and his own philosophical project either, but we are

¹⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, cited in Gordon (2010: 132).

¹⁰¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §46, p. 192).

¹⁰³ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §6b), β), p. 19).

¹⁰² Buchanan (2008: 66).

still given a detailed delimitation of the field of biology and an explanation of its position on the metaphysical map that he traces in the lecture course.

Philosophical anthropology is an important missing link in *FCM*, not only because it would serve to fill in the ‘spirit gap’ in Heidegger’s metaphysical account of the contemporary life/spirit distinction, but because it contains resources that could help return us to the ancient Greek concepts that Heidegger privileges. Heidegger, of course, has his own way of steering us back towards this ancient understanding of the human, *physis*, and philosophy. However, before looking at his attempt in Chapter 7, I wish to emphasise the aspects of the connection between contemporary anthropological and ancient philosophical thought that Heidegger neglects. In particular I will argue that, had Heidegger looked with a more charitable, thorough, and imaginative eye at Scheler and the philosophical-anthropological tradition, he would have found that it is not only mindful and critical of the metaphysical prejudices that have been inherited throughout history, but that it reads, at certain points, like a direct rearticulation of the Greek conception of the human as a being that ‘speaks out’ about *physis* from within *physis*, which he takes to be so illuminating. Philosophical anthropology supports Heidegger’s thesis that human beings are world-forming in four ways. First, the foundations of philosophical anthropology have methodological origins, inspired by Greek thought, that align with the foundations of Heidegger’s thesis. Secondly, the philosophical anthropologists, like Heidegger, make significant use of Uexküll’s theoretical biology. Thirdly, philosophical anthropology places emphasis on the notion that there is a radical openness to human existence, and it makes specific use of the concept of homesickness—and the connection between homesickness and philosophising—to describe this openness. I will now look briefly at each of these similarities in turn.

First, regarding the corresponding philosophical foundations, there is a reverberation of the philosophical-anthropological attempt to rethink traditional accounts of the human’s place in nature and its own form of naturalness in Heidegger’s critique of the divisions and categorisations that comprise the history of metaphysics. Though Heidegger does not follow Herder in pursuing an understanding of the peculiarities of the human body, he shares Herder’s ‘critical anxiety’ concerning the compartmentalised concepts that we have inherited.¹⁰⁴ In a Heideggerian spirit, philosophical

¹⁰⁴ Seyhan (2009: 9).

anthropology attempts to articulate its questions in a way that avoids the self-sundering dichotomies of Cartesianism, faculty psychology, and materialist biology. It aims to retrieve the whole of the human being from these fields of enquiry. It therefore seeks to reassemble—rather than isolate even further—the ‘divergent’ ‘free floating’ disciplines that, according to Heidegger, broke away from one another following the formation of Plato’s Academy.¹⁰⁵ When we consider the Romantic-sounding overture to Herder’s anthropology, which lays the groundwork for the entire philosophical-anthropological tradition, it is hard to ignore a Herderian echo in the rhetoric used by Heidegger at the start of *FCM*. When considered in this light, the tradition of philosophical anthropology does not look like a further disarticulation of the essential and primordial knowledge possessed by the Greeks. The discipline appears, contra Heidegger, to be far more than a fragment of knowledge buffeted about on the sea of Western metaphysics; its entire aim is to emulsify the revelations of the history of philosophy with an empirically rich understanding of human morphology.

Secondly, regarding the significance of Uexküll, in his enquiry into Uexküll’s theoretical biology, Heidegger poses the very question that motivates the entire philosophical-anthropological concern with the human organism. Though it seems anathema to Heidegger’s thought, the necessity of the philosophical-anthropological turn towards morphology is one that Heidegger recognises and even anticipates in *FCM*. He notes that Uexküll’s concept of the animal *Umwelt* is valuable, because it avoids mechanistic reductionism by regarding the organism, not as a closed system, but as continually responsive to environmental stimuli and forces.¹⁰⁶ However, he sees Uexküll’s research as the provisional stage of an investigation that must go far deeper. He shares this caveat with the philosophical anthropologists, who agree that we cannot take the concept of the surrounding world of the animal and use this model to describe the human world.¹⁰⁷ Though living beings may disrupt the physico-chemical categories employed by the mechanistic tradition to describe organisms, the human disrupts the more holistic organism–environment nexus described in *Umwelt* theory.

The implication in both Heidegger’s and philosophical anthropologists’ readings of Uexküll is that the human cannot be properly understood if it is treated, along with other creatures, as the centrifugal nucleus of a specific habitat to which it is adapted and which governs its range of possible actions.

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §10, p. 35).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 263.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, §61b), p. 264.

The philosophical-anthropological tradition, counter to Heidegger's representation of it, begins with the enigma of the human's peculiar separation from a natural environment, its 'existential liberation from the organic world—its freedom and detachability from the bondage and pressure of life, from its dependence upon all that belongs to life'.¹⁰⁸ Rather than simplistically positing the human as a living being plus some 'spiritual' capacity, philosophical anthropology begins with the more subtle observation that the human subverts the customary schemas used in biology to describe organisms.

This shared interpretation of Uexküll gives rise to the third aspect of the affinity between Heidegger and the philosophical anthropologists concerning the openness of human existence. The philosophical-anthropological concept of world-openness as a capacity that emerges from nature intersects Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek understanding of the human as a rupturing in *physis*, an opening through which *physis* realises itself in and through *logos*. Though they start out from different perspectives, with Heidegger eschewing all 'regional-ontological', physiological determinations of human beings in favour of reinvoking a more primordial understanding from Greek philosophy, the outcome of the two currents of thought harmonise on this point: the human is envisaged in both as an opening in nature. According to Schelerian anthropology, the very ability of the human to take an attitude towards itself and simultaneously to discover and to invent its reality is the most salient clue when it comes to questioning what it means to be human. This idea correlates in a striking way with Heidegger's claim that, prior to any concrete theorising, human existence has always already exemplified its own singularity as an opening onto world, an opening in *physis* that is capable of taking in and questioning existence as such. In this respect, Heidegger says, human *Dasein* 'always already intrinsically brings the truth about itself along with it'.¹⁰⁹

A similar perspective can be seen in both positions in which the human is depicted as the only type of being that must confront its existence, a being for whom entities are hyper-available, rather than available only insofar as they are relevant, and whose own being presents a 'difficult problem'.¹¹⁰ This conception of the human's unique openness is expressed, according to Agamben, in the taxonomy of Linnaeus, in which the human species was first named *Homo Sapiens*. The term *Sapiens*, Agamben argues, was intended to express the Delphic maxim 'know thyself'.¹¹¹ It was not added

¹⁰⁸ Scheler (2002 [1928]: 52).

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §67, p. 281).

¹¹⁰ Gehlen (2002: 61).

¹¹¹ Agamben (2004: 25).

as a description of this particular type of hominid, but was rather an 'imperative' taken from ancient knowledge.¹¹² Agamben claims that the human, according to this definition,

has no specific identity other than the *ability* to recognise himself. Yet to define the human not through any *nota characteristicia*, but rather through his self-knowledge, means that man is the being which recognises itself as such, that *man is the animal that must recognise itself as human to be human*.¹¹³

Human existence is envisaged here, not as a category in a taxonomy of beings, but as an ongoing, open-ended process of self-establishment. Agamben's account captures the doxographical similarity between Heidegger's conception of human existence and that of the philosophical anthropologists.

There is a final, related sense in which the philosophical-anthropological tradition expresses a Heideggerian principle, albeit using its own distinct vocabulary. This principle concerns the way in which, according to Heidegger, human Dasein comes to do metaphysics—that is, comes to question its existence and relationship to *physis* and how this capacity for metaphysics arises from 'homesickness'. Heidegger claims in the *Preliminary Appraisal* that it is only as a result of Dasein's being 'gripped' that such questioning is possible.¹¹⁴ As a being that originates in and is constituted by a breakage in *physis* and is thus fundamentally 'attuned' to its existence by a kind of primordial nomadism, an essential 'homesickness', the human must begin its enquiries by first finding a point of stability. This idea is akin to one that runs throughout philosophical anthropology—namely, that the human organism is rendered vulnerable by an extreme receptivity to sensations, none of which directly captures its attention. The human being must continually face up to the fact that its life is not wholly anchored in nature—that it is 'homeless' in the sense invoked by Heidegger—and that it must, therefore, find the means to stabilise itself and gain a grip on its life. Uexküll anticipates this concept when he claims that the infusorian, with its basic sensory world, 'rests more peacefully in its environment than does the child in its cradle'.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. 25–6.

¹¹⁴ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §2b), p. 7).

¹¹⁵ Cited in Gordon (2010: 75).

We can recall that, in his elaboration of this homesickness, Heidegger cites Novalis's description of philosophy as an 'urge' (*Trieb*) to be at home. It is important to note Novalis's use, in his fragment, of the term *Trieb*, rather than *Sehnsucht*, denoting a visceral, non-deliberative desire, a bodily appetite rather than an activity of elevated contemplation and yearning. The implication here is that, in order to understand philosophy, which is, in a sense, the most 'radically human', counter-natural activity, we need to understand the manner in which this activity is staged within and through our own living being. The achievement of philosophical anthropology from Herder onwards resides in its ability to investigate the complex reciprocal relation between the human *qua* finite, living, breathing entity, and this apparently counter-natural propensity for reflection, for *Besonnenheit*, for philosophy. Philosophical anthropology thus appears to capture the ambiguity, the apparent intractability, of the human's relationship to life, the life *in* the human, and the sense in which this life is *itself* the condition for the possibility of the human's stance within nature, its capacity to question the world to which it is open.

Concluding Remarks on Heidegger and Philosophical Anthropology

Does the fact that Heidegger seems to endorse the thesis that the human is world-forming, and that this thesis appears to be indebted to Scheler's concept of 'world-openness', provide further evidence that, counter to his critical assessment of contemporary anthropology, he implicitly approves of the outcome of its research—that is, the idea that the human is essentially 'world-open'? Is it perhaps the case that Heidegger is wary of philosophical anthropology precisely because he knows that, despite his dismissal of all its manifestations as mere worldview, aspects of the discipline are echoed in his own approach? And how are we to interpret the proximity in the respective approaches?

For instance, given that a Romantic sensibility engenders philosophical anthropology in the late eighteenth century, and this discipline is understood by Heidegger as a form of worldview, does this mean that Heidegger's Romantically influenced philosophical explorations in *FCM* could be construed as worldview-like? An alternative possibility is that Heidegger believes that the Romanticism that he makes reference to in *FCM* does indeed capture the original Greek meaning of human existence and of

philosophy, and is not merely a progenitor of worldview. This would imply that philosophical anthropology, as the offspring of German Romanticism, may be more philosophically interesting than Heidegger thinks, or rather leads us to believe. Rather than locating Heidegger's analysis in *FCM* in the 'worldview category', this possibility would imply that Romanticism and philosophical anthropology are located in the 'philosophy category'. However, if Heidegger does suspect that philosophical anthropology is worthy of interest, he certainly does not imply this in the lecture course.

Regarding the proximity between Heidegger's concept of world-formation and the philosophical-anthropological concept of world-openness, this is a matter of exegetical analysis. Heidegger could be using the concept in the same spirit as he uses the term 'world-poverty—that is, as an expression of the delusions of modern metaphysics, delusions that, he argues, are the product of the peculiarly contemporary anthropological lens that the human has constructed to view the world. If this is the case, then Heidegger is utilising the thesis as a way of opening up the question of our contemporary metaphysical prejudices, and not, as Krell insists, in order to place the human being on top of a hierarchical taxonomy of his own making. Alternatively, Heidegger could have a more profound intention for his third thesis—namely, to take the concept of 'world' that it expresses and use this concept as a vehicle that can return us to the essential knowledge from which we have strayed.

Heidegger's claim that philosophical anthropology is rooted in a derivative and non-essential understanding of life and spirit and their relatedness in human beings seems to be somewhat unwarranted. When we consider the philosophical anthropologists' Herderian-inspired line of questioning, it does not appear to be the case that its conception of the human is grounded in a treatment of life and spirit as already determined properties. The situation, upon close examination, appears to be the reverse. For the philosophical anthropologists, it is the need to go beyond orthodox biological principles that is conspicuous when it comes to examining the structure of the human being, and that demands we question the human in new ways. The term 'life' is thus treated as the name for a series of problems and questions and not as the title of a specific domain of beings or a discernible sector of human existence. The same applies to the term 'spirit'. The influence that Scheler has on subsequent works of philosophical anthropology, evidenced in Gehlen's thought, lies, not in the idea of spirit as a supersensible domain that levitates above life, but rather in the more basic idea that human action is curiously liberated by a retardation of instincts.

Gehlen follows Nietzsche in claiming that the human is the 'not yet determined animal', a creature that we have yet to comprehend.¹¹⁶ Though Heidegger would reject all definitions of the human that are founded on comparative studies of organisms, this statement does contain some resonance with his insistence that fixed, hierarchical conceptions of the human as a living being plus spirit, reason, or language are 'premature' and that the being of the human is something that we have not yet succeeded in clarifying.¹¹⁷

So, it does not seem to be the case that philosophical anthropology is straitjacketed, in the manner that Heidegger identifies, by the dictates of an anthropo-biological or 'spiritual-cultural-psychological' worldview. The philosophical anthropologists are treating the human not as part of a biological continuum, nor as a rational animal, but rather as an entity that breaks through these categorisations and does so in an enigmatic manner, one that has not been accounted for by Darwinism or by any other branch of modern biology.

Given its proximity to Heidegger, philosophical anthropology can be said to contain the germ of something essential about human existence on Heidegger's terms. In claiming this, I am not suggesting that philosophical anthropology cannot be contained within the history of contemporary thought that Heidegger critiques in *FCM*, nor that it does not rely on the concept of a division between life and spirit that stems, as Heidegger says, from a reductive reading of Nietzsche.¹¹⁸ I am instead arguing for an interpretation of philosophical anthropology that reflects my reading of Heidegger's claims concerning the philosophical potentiality of the fundamental attunement of profound boredom. Just as profound boredom can inspire either a superficial 'science-worldview' response, or a deeper, genuinely philosophical response, philosophical anthropology represents two distinct possibilities. It can be exploited unthinkingly, and used as a way of propping up an understanding of the human as a complex of traits, some of which belong to life and some to spirit, or it can be utilised more profoundly as a way of galvanising the disparate approaches of various scientific and philosophical disciplines, and of producing a biologically astute as well as philosophically curious account of the human.

It seems to me that Heidegger considers his own thesis that the human is world-forming to contain both of these possibilities. What he fails to realise

¹¹⁶ Gehlen (2002: 60).

¹¹⁷ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §46, p. 194).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §18, p. 71.

is that, just as his conception of world-formation can redirect us towards deeper philosophical knowledge, the philosophical-anthropological concept of world-openness is also an expression of this knowledge, despite belonging to the heart of the contemporary situation. Heidegger's insistence that *all* anthropology is *Darstellung* founded on the life/spirit opposition, and that anthropology therefore precludes any understanding of philosophising as the human's essential characteristic—of the human as the 'metaphysical being'—appears problematic. Moreover, philosophical anthropology begins to look like an essential, unexploited resource that extends and enriches Heidegger's observations in *FCM*. In the following, final chapter I will return to Heidegger's own treatment of his final thesis, and demonstrate the manner in which he uses it more positively than his thesis on animals as a means for returning us to the ancient understanding of the human that he wishes to advocate.

The Outcome, Criticisms and Legacy of Heidegger's Comparative Examination

Heidegger's Attempt to Steer Us Back to Ancient Knowledge Using the Concept of 'World'

If, as Heidegger insists, we are to reject even the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler as yet another iteration of the life/spirit opposition, how does he want us to proceed from here? I wish to recall my earlier claim that, for Heidegger, there are two possible responses to the fundamental attunement of profound boredom. Either we respond superficially to it by wedding ourselves to the anodyne declarations of science and worldview, or we can attempt to summon the 'courage of mood [*Mut*] for what this fundamental attunement gives us to know'—in other words, to 'listen to what it has to tell us' and '*really* [to] question what this attunement gives us to question'.¹ Having looked at the manner in which this attunement determines contemporary thought, how are we to know what we are 'listening out for', and how are we to direct our questioning in a way that enables the deeper, more 'courageous' response to the contemporary situation? Heidegger spends so much time taking us through *Kulturphilosophie* and biology, and the manner in which they use the categories of life and spirit without questioning them in their origin, that we find ourselves hard pressed, at this point in the lecture course, to recall Heidegger's account of the more originary, more essential, knowledge that he presents at the start of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (*FCM*).

In the final stages of *FCM*, Heidegger demonstrates the manner in which we can travel upstream from the metaphysical quagmire of our situation in order to access deeper and more essential knowledge of the human, metaphysics, and *physis*. To facilitate this move, Heidegger considers it necessary to review what has been garnered from the study of our contemporary

¹ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §38b), p. 167; §31a), p. 139; §38b), p. 167).

situation and its expression through the media of *Kulturphilosophie* and biology. Heidegger's hope throughout the lecture course has been that, by coming to know the essential distinctions that arise in these fields in all their superficiality, we will enable ourselves to go deeper into the attunement of profound boredom, and eventually to replace the contemporary opposition between life and spirit with a more primordial understanding of the human and its status within *physis*. Heidegger's brief study in Part One of *Kulturphilosophie* revealed that the divide between life and spirit has become deeply culturally embedded in contemporary metaphysics, and his examination of biology served to furnish our understanding of this divide further. Now that we have looked in some detail at Heidegger's engagement with these branches of thought, it is finally possible to demonstrate the precise manner in which he will wrest something more essential from them.

Heidegger's enquiry into biology, framed around his thesis that the animal is 'poor in world', results in a vague but nonetheless metaphysically intriguing concept of world. When it comes to the thesis that the human is world-forming, Heidegger wishes to depict the concept of world-formation in two ways. On the one hand, he views the concept as contained within the history that he has been critiquing, and therefore as a further expression of the split between life and spirit. This implies that, just as the concept of 'world-poverty' captured the approach of contemporary theoretical biology and zoology, the concept of 'world-formation' captures the entire philosophical-anthropological approach, including the concept of 'world-openness', and is simply an expression of the overarching anthropological perspective. On the other hand, however, Heidegger's account of the concept is intended to invoke his earlier elaboration in the *Preliminary Appraisal* of the ancient, essential understanding of the human's metaphysical disposition and place in *physis*. Ultimately, this latter use of the concept of world-formation is the channel through which Heidegger will direct us back to this ancient understanding.

This 'deeper', more positive manner in which Heidegger wishes to use the thesis on world-formation builds upon the interpretation of the concept of world that was at work in the biological research of the time. Having looked at this research in some detail, Heidegger recalls that, according to the metaphysics implicit in biology, living beings have an '*intrinsically dominant character* [...] *amongst beings in general*', in the sense that they are constantly adapting to their 'encircling rings', incorporating other entities into

them.² Hence a lizard will integrate a rock into its environment insofar as the rock shows up as a surface on which to bask in the sun. We know that, in the wake of Uexküll, the idea emerges that the human, unlike the animal, is able to appropriate entities beyond any particular context. If living beings exhibit a ‘dominant character’ among beings in general, the human exhibits a dominant character among living beings, not in a straightforwardly superior sense, but simply on account of its capacity to redirect its drives by suspending them, and thereby to create the space needed to form a world for itself. We have seen that, following Uexküll’s *Umwelt* research, a particular concept has begun to gain traction—namely, the idea that different kinds of being are opened onto different kinds of external world. Biology thus lays the groundwork for a deeper thematisation of the concept of world. In order to understand the contemporary development and metaphysical fruitfulness of this concept, Heidegger provides an appraisal of the concept of world being used.

We know, Heidegger claims, that, according to the naive, ‘natural’ concept of world, the term simply ‘signifies *beings*'.³ ‘World’ names the sum total of everything that there is, ‘quite undifferentiated with respect to “life” or “existence”’.⁴ In his comparative examination, Heidegger argues that, in contemporary metaphysics, distinctions begin to emerge between different kinds of world. ‘Life’ does not inhabit the world of ‘spirit’ and vice versa. If we look more deeply into this basic distinction between life and spirit, we see that ‘world’, according to the metaphysics that posits this life–spirit distinction, is not understood as the undifferentiated mass of entities depicted by the naive conception. Instead, Heidegger argues that world begins to ‘signify something like the *accessibility of beings*’.⁵ The idea that world is, ‘among other things’, the ‘accessibility of beings’ flies in the face of the ‘natural’ definition of world as the ‘*entirety of beings*, everything that there is, taken together’ in the ‘factual undifferentiatedness of everydayness’.⁶

Though this metaphysical understanding of world is not mobilised explicitly by the ontic scientists that Heidegger examines in *FCM*, it is implicit in their presuppositions. Heidegger wishes to emphasise that his own interrogation of the concept of world marks a deeper level of analysis that goes way beyond the reaches of this ontic science.⁷ If we decide to remain at the level of ontic science without staging a deeper interrogation of its metaphysics, we can simply stick with the idea that emerges in theoretical biology—that is,

² Ibid., §66, p. 278.

³ Ibid., §68, p. 284.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., §67, p. 279.

⁷ Ibid., §61b), p. 263.

that different entities appear to encounter their surroundings in a distinct manner, and that this entails some sort of hierarchical sequence of beings in which life and spirit are seen as separate. At its basis, this perspective preserves the 'naïve' conception of world: it reaffirms the idea of a fissure between life and spirit by conjecturing that the animal is poor in world whereas the human is world-forming. From this point of departure, it then proceeds to produce biological and anthropological theories about the being of the animal and the being of the human respectively, having already presupposed their essential characteristics. It uses the concepts of life and spirit like pieces of a puzzle, properties that can be added together in order to gain an understanding of different beings. The approach culminates, according to Heidegger, in Scheler's anthropology, which treats man as 'the being who unites within himself all the levels of beings—physical being, the being of plants and animals, and the being specific to spirit'.⁸ This Schelerian perspective marks the pinnacle of the more superficial interpretation of the idea that the human has its own distinct relationship to world, and denies Scheler any entry into metaphysics.⁹

Despite the apparent metaphysical redundancy of this situation, Heidegger insists that, if we take the initial principle that different beings inhabit and encounter world in different ways, and interrogate the concept of world that emerges here with more discernment and with greater philosophical imagination, we will discover a more profound understanding of the concept of world that is concealed in the 'crude' distinctions of the comparative examination.¹⁰ Theoretical biology and anthropology, according to Heidegger, simply settle with an ordering of beings that is based on the derived, simplistic life–spirit categories. However, he contends that, in spite of the philosophical impoverishment of their approaches, a more metaphysically significant concept of world can be wrested from it.

This more originary understanding of the concept of world consists, Heidegger says, in the idea that world signifies 'the accessibility of beings as such rather than beings in themselves'.¹¹ According to this idea, which, Heidegger says, is implicitly presupposed in contemporary ontic–scientific thinking, 'beings do indeed also belong to world, but only insofar as they are *accessible*, insofar as beings themselves allow and enable something of the kind. This is true only if beings as such *can become manifest*'.¹² The accessibility of beings thus depends upon this requisite capacity for

⁸ Ibid., §45b), p. 192.

¹² Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., §42, p. 177.

¹¹ Ibid., §67, p. 279.

‘manifestness’.¹³ The traditional understanding of the rift between the human and life presupposes that this manifestness cannot occur for all beings in the same way. Otherwise, human beings and animals would stand ‘over against a wall of beings with the same shared content, as though the animals amongst themselves and we amongst them simply saw the same wall of beings in different ways, as though we were simply dealing with manifold aspects of the same’.¹⁴ Beings are not understood in this contemporary context as readily available for all types of entity. Instead, beings are first and foremost ‘not manifest’; they are ‘closed off and concealed’ and have to be made manifest in order to become accessible, with some entities being more capable of this manifestation than others.¹⁵

Heidegger claims that, if we examine its use carefully, the concept of ‘world’ that emerges here captures not those beings that have already been made manifest, but rather the activity of manifestness itself.¹⁶ In other words, world pertains to the activity in which beings are removed from ‘concealment’ and made manifest.¹⁷ We can thus begin to see a point of return to the more primordial, more essential Greek understanding in the light of which Heidegger launches his project in *FCM*. This concept of world as the outcome of an act of ‘unconcealment’ immediately begins to reinvoke Heidegger’s claims in the *Preliminary Appraisal* concerning the Heraclitean concept of *physis* as essentially self-concealing, and of the human as the conduit of unconcealment.

Once we have established this fundamental link between the material presented on world-formation in the later sections of *FCM* and the metaphysical explorations in the opening of the lecture course, other connections begin to emerge. Heidegger claims, for example, that the ‘manifestness’ that constitutes world is ‘not a manifestness of just any kind whatsoever, but rather *manifestness of beings as such as a whole*’.¹⁸ We can recall Heidegger’s claim in the *Preliminary Appraisal* that, according to the most originary definition of *physis*—which came prior to all disciplinary fragmentation and prior to the modern life/spirit division—*physis* names both ‘beings as a whole’ and ‘beings as such’, the beings that ‘prevail’ in *physis* as well as their ‘prevailing’.¹⁹ The latter side of this distinction, ‘beings as such’ or the ‘prevailing of beings’, names not a region of entities but rather the essential nature of beings, their ‘innermost essence’, whereas the former names the

¹³ Ibid. 280.

¹⁴ Ibid., §66, p. 278.

¹⁵ Ibid., §67, p. 280.

¹⁶ Ibid., §68, p. 284.

¹⁷ Ibid., §67, p. 280.

¹⁸ Ibid., §68, p. 284.

¹⁹ Ibid., §8d), a), p. 30.

totality of beings.²⁰ The concept of world as 'the manifestness of beings as such and as a whole' therefore returns us to *physis* as the totality that incorporates both of these dimensions, the totality that is made manifest through world-formation.

We can recall Heidegger's claim in the *Preliminary Appraisal* that Aristotle gathers these two dimensions of *physis* into a unified discipline of 'First Philosophy'.²¹ This First Philosophy, Heidegger says, is 'philosophising proper'—that is, 'a questioning concerning $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in this dual sense: questioning concerning beings as a whole, and together with this, questioning concerning being'.²² In Aristotle these concepts do not 'suppress' one another; they 'continue alongside one another'.²³ Heidegger claims that their reciprocal relation runs more deeply than this:

[T]hey are not only alongside one another, for the insight gradually awakens that *both meanings* which come to the fore in $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$ right from the commencement, albeit unaccentuated, express something equally essential and therefore persist in *that* questioning which in principle questions concerning the prevailing of beings as a whole: philosophy.²⁴

Philosophy, in this original sense, does not treat the two dimensions of *physis* as separate subject areas. It would, therefore, not recognise the far narrower subdivisions of 'life' or 'spirit'. However, as I indicated in Chapter 2, Heidegger claims that this original understanding of the reciprocity of 'beings' and their essential 'being' eventually breaks down into a conception of distinct fields of research in the ancient formation of philosophical schools.²⁵ Philosophy no longer names an essential opening onto existence, a 'supreme' exercise in which beings are 'spoken out', removed from concealment, and articulated in their essence, but is seen as 'something for everyone to learn and repeat'.²⁶ Rather than retaining the profound ambivalence and interdependence of these two poles of *physis*, a basic distinction is carved within the totality of beings that there are in nature:

With respect to these two fundamental orientations, the expression $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$ develops into these two fundamental meanings: $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma\iota\circ\tau\alpha$, beings as they are accessible in physics, in the investigation of nature in the narrower sense, and $\varphi\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in its second meaning as nature, just as we use

²⁰ Ibid., §8d), β), p. 31.

²⁴ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., §9, p. 33.

²⁵ Ibid., §10.

²² Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., §6b), α), p. 16; §10, p. 35.

²³ Ibid., §8d), β), p. 31.

this expression today whenever we speak of the nature of the matter, of the essence of the matter.²⁷

From this conception of *physis* as the domain of ‘natural’ beings—that which ‘forms’ and ‘passes away of its own accord’—a further domain of beings develops: those beings that develop as a result of *techne*—that is, from ‘human production’ rather than from ‘nature’.²⁸ This burgeoning distinction is solidified via the formation of academic schools into the fundamental distinction between *physis* and *ēthos*.²⁹ This division then gives way to the concept of a fissure between nature and the human, between life and spirit. Beings as a whole (the ‘form’ that beings take) and beings as such (their ‘essence’) eventually mutate into a conception of ‘life’ and ‘spirit’ respectively.

A closer look at the metaphysics that underpins contemporary biology and anthropology thus eventually leads us back to where we started in Heidegger’s *Preliminary Appraisal*. We can, Heidegger hopes, replace the false dichotomy of life and spirit by rethinking *physis* as both the totality of beings and beings in their essence. The metaphysical conception of world that is unknowingly presupposed in contemporary ontic science is one in which world is understood as a kind of structuring of beings. Non-human animals may make certain beings manifest—for example, the lizard may be said to make the rock manifest—but this type of manifestness has a narrow range. The rock can be made manifest for the lizard as a warm surface on which to rest, or an object under which to seek shelter. In other words, this type of manifestness takes place at a local level, within an environment. Manifestness of beings ‘as such as a whole’, on the other hand, is what it means to have a world rather than an environment, which ultimately means to be able to wrest beings from concealment rather than simply respond to them passively. The kind of being that has the capacity to enter into this dynamic of manifestness will be one whose structure is not already fixed and determined in advance, one that is therefore impelled to determine itself by disclosing beings as such and as a whole. There is a sense in which the ‘ultimate’ activity of philosophy that Heidegger describes in *FCM* is the exercise in which the manifestness of beings that occurs in world-formation reflects back on itself.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., §9, p. 34.

²⁸ Ibid., §8d), a), p. 31.

²⁹ Ibid., §10, p. 35.

³⁰ Ibid., §6b), a), p. 16.

When stripped back to their bare metaphysical suppositions, contemporary biology and anthropology, as the disciplines that develop out of the rigid ground of the life/spirit division, can be reduced to this understanding of world as manifestness. A large part of *FCM* has been a process of excavating the conceptual soil of the life sciences, with the result that, according to Heidegger, we have at least begun to grasp the contemporary understanding of world, the first of the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics. Thus far, the branches of thought that develop in conjunction with this fundamental concept have been critiqued by Heidegger. The contents of biology and the anthropological perspectives of *Kulturphilosophie* have seemed from his perspective to be little more than confirmations of the misapprehensions of modern metaphysics. However, in this contemporary conception of world, Heidegger has begun to identify a deeper understanding of the most profound themes of the lecture course: of the human as a being that, in its finitude and solitude, is compelled to 'form' world, and of world, finitude, and solitude as fundamental concepts of metaphysics, which also means fundamental concepts of *Dasein* as the being that speaks out of *physis* and in which these fundamental concepts are united.

An understanding of this tapestry of concepts—*Dasein*, *physis*, philosophy, world, finitude, and solitude—eventually begins to emerge from within Heidegger's engagement with the delusions of modern metaphysics, despite the fact that this tapestry of concepts eludes the various channels of thought that Heidegger examines in his engagement. Having forayed into *Kulturphilosophie* and ontic science in order to understand what we are up against, Heidegger has begun to get us back on track by showing us the difference between the derivative, stratified metaphysical categories that we unwittingly employ and a more ancient, genuinely philosophical mode of thinking.

In the *Preliminary Appraisal*, Heidegger cites Plato's claim in *The Republic* that 'the difference between the philosophising human being and the one who is not philosophising is the difference between being awake (ὕπαρ) and sleeping (ὄναρ)'.³¹ The contemporary age of science and of the 'proclamations of worldview' found in *Kulturphilosophie* has been one of 'non-philosophising' in this sense. Heidegger claims that the 'non-philosophising human being, including the scientific human being, does indeed exist, but he or she is asleep. Only philosophising is wakeful *Dasein*,

³¹ Ibid., §7, p. 23.

is something totally other, something that stands incomparably on its own with respect to everything else'.³² Here Heidegger anticipates the philosophical futility of contemporary attempts to order and compare beings, to place the human and life within a predetermined schema of entities for the sake of ascertaining their distinct traits. As the only being that 'speak[s] out of the whole and into it', the only being capable of disclosing beings as such and as a whole, the being of *Dasein* cannot be captured by these orthodox methods of ordering and stratifying beings.³³ There is a sense in which this type of comparative stratification serves to keep *Dasein* asleep by presenting it with convenient and comforting categorisations with which to comprehend itself. At the start of *FCM*, Heidegger claimed that his intention was to 'awaken' us to the fundamental attunement that characterises our age, so that we might eventually recognise its philosophical potency. In these concluding stages of the lecture course, Heidegger hopes that we can finally be roused from the somnolence of our metaphysical situation, that we can respond to the fundamental attunement of the contemporary age positively and courageously, and that we can respond to our contemporary circumstances with deeper curiosity. The thrust of his analysis is, therefore, the idea that wakefulness and watchfulness, and not 'clarity', 'calculability', and 'certainty', are the goals for which we should strive. If we have neat, ready-made rankings, we stop watching carefully, and, as Ortega says, remaining watchful of oneself is essential in a being that 'escapes from the zoological scale' principally on account of its 'conduct', its *ethos*, its capacity, as the philosophical anthropologists articulate it, to act with radical plasticity in response to its environment.³⁴

A Return to the 'Hierarchising Charge' and a Look Ahead to Later Works

Having looked in detail at Heidegger's project in *FCM*, and attempted to address some of the gaps in the standard reading of the lectures, I wish briefly to return now to the objections that I laid out in Chapter 1. The aim of my analysis of Heidegger's engagement with biology was to show that his animal thesis is posited in the light of, rather than in spite of, the findings of biology. Heidegger's comparative examination aims to articulate

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., §75, p. 353.

³⁴ Ortega y Gasset (2002: 171).

fundamental biological principles concerning the structure of the organism that gained impact following Darwin. His description of the animal as restricted to a specific environment—an environment that is attenuated in accordance with the specificity of its impulses—is embedded in the suppositions of the comparative ethology of his time. The specific formulation of the thesis is essentially the progeny of the theoretical biology that attempted to advance beyond mechanism and vitalism, and to address what it considered to be explanatory gaps in Darwinism. The breadth of this history within biology complicates the contention expressed by Derrida and Agamben that Heidegger's key ambition is to emphasise human separateness, and that he has invented a comparative method of analysis to achieve this result. If we attend to the history of biology, we see that Heidegger's claims in *FCM* are notable, not as isolated attempts to preserve a pre-Enlightenment ontology of human uniqueness, but rather for their lucid articulation of the metaphysical architecture that prevailed during this phase in the history of the life sciences.

The broader metaphysical context that I have provided seems to problematise the objection—presented in the readings I analysed in Chapter 1—that Heidegger's lectures present a hackneyed account of human's elevation over the rest of nature, one that endows the human with characteristics that are unjustifiably denied to the animal. This is principally because the originary Greek conception, which, Heidegger argues throughout the lectures, has been disarticulated throughout history and culminates in the proclamations of *Kulturphilosophie*, the conception that the entirety of *FCM* is driving at, does not flatly, unambiguously promote the ontological superiority of the human. We see this if we examine Heidegger's claim, following Heraclitus, that the self-concealing tendency of entities depends upon their more essential drive towards *unconcealment*, because entities can hide only insofar as there is a possibility of their being pursued and revealed. Insofar as the human 'exists among' beings, insofar as *physis* incorporates the human, beings will find fulfilment through the human process of 'speaking out'.³⁵ This dynamic of unconcealment is a reciprocal relationship in which beings are realised via this corruption of their self-concealing urges. Beings acquire something from Dasein's unconcealing activities, and Dasein, qua Dasein, is drawn into and bound by its propensity for unconcealment, its obedience to the process of uncovering beings. What may look

³⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §8b), p. 26).

at first like signs of a total break between Dasein and *physis* are, therefore, instances of a continuity between the two: the exercise in which Dasein tears itself from *physis* in order to initiate the unconcealment of beings is simply an example of self-rupturing, and hence of *physis*. Dasein's habit of covering over and fleeing from its metaphysical predisposition, a habit that Heidegger examines throughout *FCM*, is likewise a sign of Dasein's continuity; it is the form that Dasein's self-concealment takes, the 'natural' course of its existence as a being within *physis*. There are multiple examples of sectors of *physis* that are not replicated elsewhere, traits that are peculiar to only one type of entity. Though Heidegger's account of the ontological distinction between human and non-human entities becomes more pronounced and sweeping in later works, in *FCM* Dasein's urge towards speaking out is described as distinct from other idiosyncratic manifestations of natural behaviour insofar as it encompasses a kind of melancholic pathos that is spared to other entities.

Heidegger's account does not, therefore, arrive at human existence by simply 'adding to' life, nor does it try to exempt the human from life altogether. The rupturing that constitutes Dasein's activity of speaking out is not a rupturing that Dasein inflicts upon nature in the spirit of mastery. Rather, Heidegger claims that it is a process that belongs to *physis*: following Heraclitus, he argues that beings tend to elude unconcealment by hiding themselves.³⁶ The process of unconcealment therefore has to be one of rupture, an interruption of the self-concealing drive of beings. This interruption is not rendered possible by the human; Heidegger does not attribute it to a non-natural 'spiritual' capacity on the part of the human that is able to defy nature and wrest entities from concealment. On the contrary, this possibility resides within *physis*, with the domain beings themselves. For, if beings were not somehow amenable to unconcealment, this interruption would be impossible, and all of Dasein's attempts to disclose beings would be redundant.³⁷

The claim that the human is the being that speaks out of *physis* does invoke the notion of hierarchy, but what type of hierarchy is really at play here? This 'speaking out' ascribes to the human a discursive freedom that liberates it from the natural terrain that encapsulates other beings. However, this liberation from the terrestrial is also a form of entrapment, since the human has no option but to forge world. The 'richness' of the human world

³⁶ Ibid., §8b), p. 27.

³⁷ Ibid., §67, p. 279.

thus takes the form of the indeterminacy and openness of existence, as opposed to the secure, closed-off animal habitat. Biological plasticity, linguistic freedom, *Mitsein*, being-towards-death, 'moodedness', and temporality are all constituents of a being with no fixed natural environment, a being that has no choice but to 'penetrate' and grasp world qua penetrable, graspable field of unlimited significances.

By revising the hierarchising charge, I am not suggesting that we should ignore what appears to be a quite transparently hierarchical implication of Heidegger's claims in Part Two of the lectures. Nor am I denying that these claims develop directly into Heidegger's subsequent bald statements in, say, *Being and Truth*, concerning the 'superior power of Being' that admits only the human, or his insistence in *Letter on Humanism* that the classification of the human as a rational animal does not think the human's *humanitas* 'high enough'.³⁸ Heidegger has his own antecedent philosophical interest in keeping human Dasein out of zoological categories. The peculiarity of Dasein is written right across his corpus, and to deny that he accords a special place to Dasein in the field of *physis* would be to misunderstand his thinking. However, in *FCM*, Heidegger's hierarchical implications are far more nuanced and biologically well informed than the standard reception has allowed for. His concern is to explore with the manner in which the human is part of *physis*, and to recast the Greek idea that it is an aspect of the human's form of *physis* to 'speak out' of *physis*. If the human were not part of *physis* at all, if it were wholly above the rest of life, there would be no sense of an earthly 'home' to be 'sick' for, and it is this Novalisian notion of a fractured connection, which emerges in the comparative analysis of animal life, that intrigues Heidegger in this context.

If we appraise the lecture course as a whole, it seems that Heidegger's preoccupation with the distinct ways in which different beings—human and non-human—encounter world places *FCM* closer to the Aristotle lectures than to Heidegger's later writings. The sweeping statements contained in these writings about the ontological paucities of animality make them especially vulnerable to concerns about evaluative hierarchising. However, though Heidegger's claims concerning non-human animals appear to radicalise over time, the thrust of the metaphysical picture presented in *FCM* regarding man's fractured relationship to *physis* remains intact, preserved via his analysis of the 'strife' between world and earth. Heidegger's picture of

³⁸ Heidegger (2001 [1933–4]: §5a), p. 80; 1997 [1946]: 233–4).

the human as the site of a ‘violent’ struggle to wrest truth from beings and construct a space for itself on the earth shows that, even in these later works, he is not pursuing the idea of human uniqueness and superiority simply for its own sake. Schalow argues that the concept of earth in the later Heidegger gathers together the ‘ground shaking’ and ‘abyssmal’ conceptions of embodiment and proximity to the animal that are contained in the earlier writings.³⁹ Heidegger never relinquishes the principle of *physis* as essentially enigmatic, self-concealing, and ultimately impermeable to the human’s increasingly calculative and representational view of the world, and it is this ultimate intractability that denies *Dasein* a ‘home’ in the sense of the animal’s environment.

Schalow claims that, because the earth ‘points to the locus of human inhabitation, and in turn marks our intersection with nature [*physis*], a nagging ambivalence arises’.⁴⁰ Unlike the animal, the human needs world in order to inhabit earth. Heidegger claims that, as the human is a world-accessing being, its form of inhabitation is to be understood as ‘dwelling’, as the construction of a living space on the earth.⁴¹ The human’s relation to earthly locations is always saturated with the worldly significance that it always already affords to them, and this significance exceeds the factual coordinates of any particular location. ‘When I go toward the door of the lecture hall,’ Heidegger says, ‘I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am there. I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather I am there, that is, I already pervade the space of the room, and only thus can I go through it.’⁴² The human recruits its worldliness in order to traverse the earth, but worldliness cannot render earth wholly calculable and thereby divest it of its mysteries. The human mode of being in Heidegger’s later work, though it is securely other than the animal mode, is not freed from the painful aspects of the metaphysicality that Heidegger illuminates in *FCM*.

The ideas that punctuate Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* from early to late, of *Dasein* as thrown into the world, haunted by time and death, anxious ‘in the very depths of its being’, as the conduit of a strife between world and earth, all problematise the claim that the endowments that Heidegger grants to *Dasein* raise it inalienably above the rest of nature. *Dasein* may be the ‘clearing’ of Being, the speaker of *logos*, the grasper of entities ‘as such and as a whole’, the potentiality for an authentic grasp of existence, but there is

³⁹ Schalow (2006: 91).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 92.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Heidegger (1977 [1951]: 359).

another side to this story. In denying the animal this and that property of human existence, Heidegger is at the same time granting it something of profound significance. Yes, the human clears and discloses, exists with an existential fullness rather than 'merely lives'.⁴³ And, yes, the animal is, as Heidegger puts it, confined to an environment with which it is entirely absorbed. But, in *FCM*, the text that provides the most extended treatment of animality, it appears as if Heidegger is describing human *Dasein* as a being that must learn to cope with the fact that its life is not an animal life. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes *Dasein*'s self-tranquilising strategies of 'fleeing' into everydayness to avoid the overarching, oppressive fact of its transient existence that is disclosed in anxiety.⁴⁴ The mid to late works discuss the tension that arises in the human's ways of disclosing the world—whether artistic, linguistic, or technological—where world understood as a structure of meaning conflicts with earth as the enigmatically impermeable material backdrop of our existence.⁴⁵ In his 1949 essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', Heidegger details the tendency of human beings to give themselves over to mechanisation as a mode of revealing, to adopt technological means of eclipsing the space within which they may have to question and face up to their existence and deal with the resistance and self-concealing tendency of earth.

Given that openness to the world, the essential feature that Heidegger continually grants to *Dasein* over other life forms, is presented as fundamentally burdensome, the question of the presence of evaluative ontology in his animal reflections is a complex one. For modern readers, ontologies that grade living beings are likely to appear outmoded and unpalatable from the start, chiefly because hierarchising seems to be at odds with post-Watson-Crick scientific data, harking back to a prescientific worldview and the ethical implications of such a worldview. Storey and Schalow question whether this contemporary aversion to hierarchy might blind readers to valuable aspects of Heidegger's analysis. Storey argues that one possible interpretation of Heidegger's comparative examination is to view it as an 'ontological' hierarchy, and another is to describe it as a less radical 'ontic' hierarchy based on a difference in traits rather than a difference in entire modes of existence.⁴⁶ This divide, he argues, splits the secondary literature

⁴³ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §50, p. 210).

⁴⁴ See Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §§30, 39, 40).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Heidegger (2002 [1935–6]; *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'* (1942); *The Question Concerning Technology* (1949); (1977 [1951]).

⁴⁶ Storey (2015: 96).

on *FCM*, but both approaches assume that 'any kind of hierarchy is anthropocentric and must be avoided because it necessarily depends on some antiquated metaphysical notion of a great chain of being'.⁴⁷ However, the hierarchising charge, he argues, fails to distinguish between 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' hierarchies, where the latter is based on a repression of the lower orders and the former uses its greater capacities to safeguard and 'release' the lower orders.⁴⁸ Schalow argues along similar lines that the 'power' granted in Heidegger's analysis to *Dasein*, the 'freedom that rescues human beings from their animal-like craving', is the very mechanism that 'enables them to suspend their will within a technological context' and reject the mechanisations, including instrumental animal exploitation, that threaten to dominate at this stage in *Dasein*'s ontohistorical development.⁴⁹ Though Heidegger does not give us species 'egalitarianism', his analysis, Schalow argues, provides the groundwork needed to emancipate the animal from an instrumentalising form of technological ordering.⁵⁰ This is because the principle of openness to the whole of *physis*, of freedom from the specific habitats that determine the circle of action for world-poor animals, is one that also thrusts *Dasein* into a reflective space, in which it may interpret its distinct role as a form of 'stewardship' rather than indifferent 'mastery' over non-human animals.⁵¹

Heidegger returns to a discussion of the reciprocal relation between metaphysics and the life sciences in his 1942 lectures on *Parmenides*, where he argues that the metaphysics that blooms into biology's conception of the organism, which, as *FCM* shows, is based on a divide between life and spirit, is so pervasive that even those who attempt to overturn it remain within its contours. He critiques such attempts in his analysis of Rilke's *Eighth Elegy*, in which Rilke reveres the immediacy of animal reactions and the animal's capacity to 'see the open', to behold what is, free from the shackles of human endeavours.⁵² 'Only our eyes', Rilke says, are 'reversed', turned inward, and 'placed wholly around creatures as traps'.⁵³ Heidegger associates the intention behind Rilke's 'reversal' of the traditional order of things with a trend that begins with Schopenhauer, who tries to overthrow the Kantian idea that the ability of the human being to represent itself as 'I' raises it 'infinitely above all other living beings on earth', rendering it 'through rank and dignity an entirely different being from *things*', such as

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Schalow (2006: 108).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rainer Maria Rilke, cited in Heidegger (1982 [1942]: §8e), p. 153.

⁵³ Ibid.

irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes'.⁵⁴ 'Shame on such a morality', Schopenhauer writes, 'that fails to recognise the eternal essence that exists in every living thing, and shines forth with inscrutable insignificance from all eyes that see the sun!'⁵⁵ Heidegger claims that Nietzsche—following Schopenhauer—also proposes a 'revolutionary' version of a comparative analysis of human and animal.⁵⁶ In his second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche invites us to explore an alternative sort of comparative analysis:

Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass you by: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again, and so from morn till night and from day to day, [they are] fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure, and are thus neither melancholy nor bored. This is a hard sight for man to see; for, though he thinks himself better than the animals because he is human, he cannot help envying them their happiness—what they have, a life neither bored nor painful, is precisely what he wants, yet he cannot have it because he refuses to be like an animal. A human being may well ask an animal: 'Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?' The animal would like to answer, and say 'The reason is that I always forget what I was going to say'—but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering.⁵⁷

For Heidegger, this Nietzschean proposition is echoed in Rilke's description of the 'openness' of animal life and its elusion from the inward-gazing tendencies that constrict human beings. Heidegger notes that the common principle in their work and in Schopenhauer's is the idea that the immediate, primitive connection that the animal has with the world is a positive attribute. For Nietzsche, the fact that the animal is 'fettered to the moment', a moment in which it takes in only that which is immediately applicable, is to be regarded as a significant advantage. The human's proneness to thinking, remembering, harbouring, and reflecting on things, and its habit of focusing on its life as such, rather than this or that sensory impulse, do not place it above the animal. On the contrary, such features subject the human to a life of perpetual unrest, in which it struggles to digest the abundant flow of information pertaining to its existence, and in which its past and its future

⁵⁴ Ibid. 158; Kant (2006 [1798]: book I, §1, p. 15). ⁵⁵ Schopenhauer (1995: 96).

⁵⁶ Heidegger (1982 [1942]: §8e), p. 158. ⁵⁷ Nietzsche (1997 [1874]: 60–1).

are spread out before it, denying it what Uexküll refers to as the ‘peace’ of the animal world.⁵⁸

Rilke’s elegy, Heidegger argues, encapsulates this unorthodox favouring of the animal’s liberated impulses over human contemplation. He argues that, in the wake of Schopenhauer, this approach has gained traction in philosophy and psychoanalysis:

The priority of the unconscious over consciousness corresponds to the priority of the free animal over the imprisoned essence of man. The spirit of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, mediated by Nietzsche and the doctrines of psychoanalysis, looms behind [Rilke’s] poetry. Although Nietzsche’s metaphysics with regard to the doctrine of the will to power remains outside the compass of Rilke’s poetry, there still holds sway the one decisive common element: the essence of man as conceived on the basis of the essence of the animal.⁵⁹

Ultimately, Heidegger says, Rilke’s formulation can be traced all the way back to the Greek definition of the human being as *zōon logon echon*.⁶⁰ The outer appearance of the metaphysics of the human/animal distinction in Rilke’s poem may look very different on account of Rilke’s inversion of the traditional hierarchy and his attempt to turn orthodox ontology on its head.⁶¹ However, Heidegger points out that a reversal is conceivable only in the light of the original order, and it is therefore dependent upon that order. Rilke’s ‘revolution’, like Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s, which ‘hominises’ the creature and ‘animalises’ the human, rests on a series of suppositions that are ‘bound within the limits of the traditional metaphysical determination of man and animal’.⁶²

For Heidegger, the conception of a metaphysical abyss between the human and the animal precedes contemporary formulations, whether those of Scheler and other ‘anthropological’ philosophers of culture (which encapsulate the idea of spirit as the ‘higher’ reserve of the human being) or those associated with Nietzsche (which denounce the reign of spirit and revere life). Heidegger does not regard his theses as the expression of his own descent into the metaphysical trap of grading beings that is present in all comparative accounts. Instead, he considers the function of the theses to lie in stripping away the outer layers of the different ‘systems’ that we

⁵⁸ Gordon (2010: 75).

⁶¹ Ibid. 152.

⁵⁹ Heidegger (1982 [1942]: §8e), p. 158).

⁶² Ibid. 152, 155.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 155.

presuppose—whether metaphysical, anthropological, biological, or psychological—in order to show that the unadorned structures of thinking concealed within each one remain beholden to the original Greek conception of *zōon logon echon*, whether they attempt to affirm or to dismantle it. Rather than casting off traditional metaphysical models, the ‘revolutionary’ approaches of Rilke, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer demonstrate—as does Uexküll’s interpretation of animal worlds—that the metaphysics of abyssal difference cannot simply be set aside. These thinkers revise traditional distinctions between the human and the animal without ever departing from the essential knowledge announced in the Greek formulation, which Heidegger interprets as the basic understanding that Dasein—whether as poet, philosopher, or scientist—is the being that ‘speaks out’ from within *physis* about beings. Dasein is the only being that can enquire into the beings that populate its world. It always already possesses the openness that it needs in order to question this very openness, and grant or deny it to other beings.

The aim of Heidegger’s comparative examination is to draw attention to the fact that the production of grading systems and explanatory models is part of Dasein’s way of encountering and navigating the world. It is part of the human ‘version’ of the stimulus-response nexus that governs animal reactions. Such ‘grading systems’, whether they draw ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ conclusions for human or animal existence, and whether they come from biology, philosophy, anthropology, or poetry, are always the result of Dasein’s projections, always the progeny of Dasein’s requisite capacity to ‘speak out’ about beings. It is this ‘criterion of all criteria’, to borrow McNeill’s phrase, that is unacknowledged, according to Heidegger, in the popular contemporary procedures of animalising the human and hominising the animal.⁶³

⁶³ McNeill (2006: 51).

Conclusion

Metaphysics, Finitude, and ‘the Time of Life’

Heidegger argues in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (FCM) that the world of Dasein is not a neat capsule of entities that are always available; it is ‘ruptured’ by a fundamental finitude that impels it to develop its own anchoring in *physis*. The temporality of human existence is staged against the backdrop of absolute, geological time, the time of earthly entities, insofar as human beings are finite organisms that are temporally bounded to a particular lifespan. But this ‘terrestrial’ time is discernible only from the perspective of a mode of being that takes time as such into account. Our conceptions of the dawn of time and the timespan of the earth, as Schalow says, always ‘derive their relevance from Dasein’s mode of historicalness, and ultimately, from the history of being itself. To the extent that we can refer to “geological time”, a time of the earth, the ability to do so still hinges upon the possibility of an awareness of such terrestrial origins, of the possibility of the breakthrough of temporality’, which takes the form of human existence.¹

The force of this peculiarly human temporality is not only apparent in the profound moods of boredom or anxiety, which, McNeill says, ‘[hold] Dasein in the presence of its ownmost thrownness’.² It is also evident in Dasein’s everyday tendencies, explored by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, to flee from the overarching structure of finite temporality by engaging in the banal humdrum of idle talk and the general, benign flow of everydayness. In everydayness Dasein is able to mimic the enclosed comfort of the animal’s unwitting response to encircling stimuli; it is able to ‘dwell in tranquilised familiarity’.³ But, unlike the animal—which, as Nietzsche observed, is prone neither to melancholy nor to boredom—Dasein’s being, as the embodiment of an ek-static perspective that incorporates past, present, and future in any one moment, is always attuned to a broader field of possibilities. McNeill

¹ Schalow (2006: 99). ² McNeill (2006: 1).

³ Heidegger (1962 [1927]: §40, p. 234).

writes that the 'temporal distinction' that constitutes human existence, enabling 'worldly dwelling' and hence the development of a particular '*ēthos*', is essentially the result of a 'tension between the presence of the moment and the poetic happening of a greater whole'.⁴ It is in this sense that Heidegger describes the human as 'that inability to remain' that is 'yet unable to leave his place'.⁵ The process of world-formation results in a 'projection' (*Entwurf*), in which *Dasein* gathers together the threefold perspective of ek-static temporality, undertaking an 'anticipatory regulating' of its comportment.⁶ In projecting', Heidegger says, 'the *Da-sein* in [man] constantly *throws* him into possibilities and thereby keeps him *subjected* to what is actual'.⁷ The burdensome fact of existence is evinced in this procedure of 'projecting' and 'subjection'.

Metaphysics is presented in the lecture course as the most extreme version of this subjection, this exercise of world-formation. It is the impulse to remain open to and reflect upon the contingencies of existence, rather than shutting them down in favour of the anodyne narratives of worldview or science.⁸ The provenance of metaphysics is regarded in the lecture course as this restless, perpetual failure on the part of the human being to maintain a tight, insoluble connection to beings. He claims that philosophy understood as 'this love of...as homesickness for..., must maintain itself in nothingness, in finitude'.⁹ Philosophy is, therefore, 'the opposite of all comfort and assurance. It is turbulence, the turbulence into which man is spun, so as in this way alone to comprehend *Dasein* without delusion'.¹⁰

The activity of metaphysics itself, therefore, emerges as the most dramatic point of differentiation between human existence and animal life. McNeill describes Heidegger's account of animal life as one in which the animal organism is intimately 'bound to the *duration and time of life*'.¹¹ Its organs develop when needed, and the survival resources it requires in order to flourish show up throughout its life. Whereas the animal requires only 'terrestrial' time and the resources of the earth, the human must partake in the metaphysical process of world-formation. The animal does not have to try to 'penetrate' the earth and create its own possibilities, because the very existence if its species means that it has got what it needs from the earth. The human being, by contrast, is an entity that is not only bound to time but also 'lives' time in a way that opens it up to a plenitude of possibilities in any one

⁴ McNeill (2006: 2).

⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §76, p. 365).

⁶ Ibid. 362.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., §1a).

⁹ Ibid., §6b), β), p.19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ McNeill (2006: 9).

moment. This temporal sensitivity means that Dasein cannot simply exist as a being among others on the earth. It needs 'being', needs the structure of the 'as such and as a whole' in order to make sense of things, and cannot 'make do' with beings alone.¹² Heidegger expresses this as a sort of lament: 'If only we could do that—get by without being!'¹³ The capacity for world-disclosure is regarded by Heidegger as a struggle against a limitation, the limitation presented by its finitude and the awareness and anticipation of this finitude. World-formation is not, Schalow observes, evidence of our occupancy in a 'higher, spiritual pantheon', but the expression of the desolation that occurs beyond the veil of the animal *Umwelt*.¹⁴

Metaphysical Shifts in Scientific *Zeitgeists*

The picture we now have when we look at the broader context of Heidegger's comparative examination is not the one presented by the 'standard' critical interpretation of the lectures. Derrida, like Agamben, sees Heidegger as a philosopher who has done his utmost to keep the human being and animal separate, and hence to separate the human from its own animality. The question of Dasein's animality is one, Derrida says, that Heidegger 'leaves aside or in suspense [...] from one end to the other of his life and his thinking'.¹⁵ Haar and Jonas criticise Heidegger's failure to take into account all evidence pointing to the possession among animals of complex sounds and signal-making among animal species.¹⁶ Glendinning critiques the 'stubbornly unrevisable' character of Heidegger's comparative examination.¹⁷ Krell goes even further, arguing that *FCM* does an uncanny violence to animal life, that it 'mutilates the ape with all-too-human pieties', and that 'stages, steps, or levels in being' 'haunt' Heidegger throughout the lecture course.¹⁸ The 'ostensibly unified field of *φύσις*', Krell says, 'will crack and deracinate in order to expose strata in being', despite Heidegger's efforts.¹⁹ These assessments miss the fact that there is a violence contained in *FCM* that is directed towards human existence. There is a perspective from which it is Dasein, and not the animal, that is the recipient of an act of mutilation in the lecture course. It is Dasein that constitutes a cracking within *physis*, Dasein that suffers a brokenness within its own structure that forces it to

¹² Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §75, p. 355).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Schalow (2006: 95).

¹⁵ Derrida (2008: 155).

¹⁷ Glendinning (1998: 69).

¹⁶ See Haar (1993b); Jonas (2000).

¹⁸ Krell (1992: 315, 127–8).

¹⁹ Ibid. 128.

'tear' beings from concealment, to 'steal' truth for the purpose of constructing a world of meaning for itself, because, beyond the immediate structures of average everydayness, such a world is not already given.²⁰ Those aspects of life that Heidegger reserves for Dasein—language, sociality, selfhood, temporality, and death—are really by-products of this rupturing; they are the necessary correlates of a fundamentally fragmented and self-forming existence.

We can grasp this alternative reading of Heidegger's comparative examination if we attend to the external and internal contexts of his lecture course. Those who are anxious about the ascription of any kind of unique property to the human are likely to respond sceptically to my insistence that we open up vistas in theoretical biology and philosophical anthropology in order to understand Heidegger's claims. Despite any evidence that we may draw from these fields, Heidegger's conception of human existence as an activity in which *physis* apprehends itself through a process of rupturing and unconcealing, and the articulation of this idea through the vocabulary of theoretical biology and philosophical anthropology, may prompt the objections that, first, Heidegger's theses seem antithetical to a post-Darwinian research climate, and, secondly, even if they could be reconciled with the sciences of the day, the version of human existence that emerges from *FCM* is essentially no different from problematic classical accounts that are 'expressed', as Krell says, 'in terms of addition, subtraction or privation'.²¹ So long as *FCM* retains the idea of the exceptionality of the human being within nature, there will be disquiet among some readers, for the preservation of human uniqueness may look like a reconfiguration of hierarchies in which the human is positioned above life. This scepticism concerning anthropocentric, ontotheological interpretations of the human is warranted and important, for it aims to avoid the ultimate metaphysical bias—namely, that life is comprised of lesser versions of the human. As an authority on the concealed danger of metaphysical prejudices, Heidegger would surely want to avoid all assignations of human uniqueness.

However, this critical concern avoids any sustained analysis of the results of comparative ethological research, and the role that this research plays in Heidegger's formulation of his theses. It ultimately fails to recognise that the more labyrinthine ontology of early twentieth-century life science, cultural psychology, and anthropology made for a very different branch of research

²⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §8c), p. 29

²¹ Krell (1992: 104).

from anything that contemporary readers are likely to be accustomed to. The readings of the lecture course that I detailed in Chapter 1 take place in a radically different 'time' with respect to developments in the life sciences from that of the early twentieth century. I claimed in Chapter 5 that the phase in biology that Heidegger is responding to in *FCM* is one in which biology enjoys a far closer engagement with philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, genetics, primatology, and other fields that emphasise a continuity between the human and its anthropoid ape cousins were in their infancy. Darwinism, far from being the grand narrative of all biology, was treated by many of the greatest biologists of the age as a materialist hypothesis that did not offer a successful account of organismic function, and alternative biological theories that appear to designate metaphysical distinctions between beings were received with far more attention and interest.

In our own time, by contrast, the discovery of the biochemical formulation of DNA is over half a century old, the human genome has been decoded, and the concept of life has been both molecularised and digitised. Biology has strayed from the deep engagement with philosophy that characterised it at the time of Heidegger's lecture course. The idea that such concepts as the opposition between 'life' and 'spirit' could form the core of our approach to nature now seems alien and obscure. The contemporary techno-scientific age is one in which, as Moss claims, we wish to 'embed' the human more deeply than ever into the 'ontological democracy of the garden'.²² In the current *zeitgeist* it is *de rigueur* to deny an absolute difference between the human and non-human animals. As Weiss says, in the modern, principally naturalistic approach to the question of the human's status within the biosphere, 'the human being is eliminated as the unique object of study', because 'human nature' is considered to be 'completely accountable according to the same principles by which we account for any piece of nature'.²³ Such categories as life, spirit, mechanism, and vitalism are ironed out and replaced with the flatter ontology of genetic data.

For Heidegger, this represents a new phase in the history of metaphysics, as boredom eventually gives way to nihilism. Heidegger will describe this phase in later works as the age of technology, the 'epoch of the total lack of questioning', which saddles Dasein with a whole new way of relating to reality.²⁴ The sheer volume of genetic data now available provides a useful model for understanding living beings, including the human. However, the

²² Moss (2014).

²³ Weiss (2002: 28).

²⁴ Heidegger (2000 [1936–8]: §50, p. 76).

dominance of this model has not obliterated the idea that different living beings encounter and adapt to their habitats on the basis of the distinct environmental worlds that they occupy. Nowadays, biology has subdivided further into systems biology, molecular biology, human biology, cell biology, ethology, and so on. Heidegger would claim that, like the fragmented philosophical disciplines that formed following the establishment of Plato's Academy, these subdisciplines operate with their own hermetically sealed 'methodological schema of question and proof'.²⁵ However, even from the matrices of data produced by these approaches, it is possible to retrieve the principles that, according to Heidegger, have retained significance despite the various historical mutations of metaphysics.

The perspective that is presented in Heidegger's comparative examination goes against the general contemporary trend of homogenising all living beings using genetic information, the metaphysical 'backdrop' against which the modern reader picks up *FCM*. However, I have attempted to show that the proposals in the lecture course ought not to be rejected as outmoded or spurious. The comparative approach based on degrees of world-accessibility, and its conclusion that human beings relate to and 'form' a world in a manner that is not replicated elsewhere in nature, has maintained relevance throughout the molecular-genetic age. In his book *The Eternal Child* (2004), zoologist Clive Bromhall notes that, despite 'centuries of speculation', and in spite of the breadth of knowledge gained since the discovery of our genetic kinship to other animals, 'there is still no single, unifying theory to explain why humans evolved the way they have'.²⁶ From bipedalism to brain capacity, low skeletal agility to long infancy and distinct patterns of learning, human beings exhibit traits that are thought to be unusual in nature.²⁷

The concepts that geneticist Stephen Gould presents drawing on Konrad Lorenz's earlier insights of mature animals following inflexible modes of behaviour, and of human beings continually developing and augmenting their repertoire of action, parallel Heidegger's comparison of animal world-poverty with human world-formation.²⁸ The contemporary zeitgeist has not entirely broken away from the idea that the structures of the human world are wrought as a result of a lack of 'rigid programming' and enhanced learning capacities, or the evolutionary principle that acute organic functioning of a

²⁵ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §10, p. 37).

²⁶ Bromhall (2004: 3).

²⁷ Ibid., ch. 1.

²⁸ See Gould (1980: ch. 3) for a discussion of the contemporary appropriation in genetics of early explorations of human neoteny and organic unspecialisation.

particular kind involves a kind of ‘trade-off’ of other capacities.²⁹ Paleoanthropologist Rick Potts argues that ‘orthodox renderings of human origin’ tend to ‘look no farther than the internal properties of our species’—properties such as tool use, language, brain capacity, hunting capacities, and tendencies towards intergroup aggression—to explain human evolution.³⁰ This approach became problematic, he says, in the face of post-Darwinian observations in primatology and comparative zoology, which indicated the existence of many of these ostensibly ‘internal properties’ in other species.³¹ Potts argues that a more nuanced view must take into account the broader ecological circumstances of human evolution, rather than seeking out a single cause, measurable in a laboratory, that can explain human evolutionary development. The capacity of our ancestors to withstand radical environmental and climatic change points to a plasticity in human reactions that can account for the idiosyncratic process of human evolution:

Humanity evolved in a halting manner as environments became less predictable and more varied from place to place [...] The two-legged toolmakers who survived were those able to cope with fitful alterations of their habitat.³²

The key principle of our evolutionary trajectory is thus ‘the ability to adjust and diversify our behaviour, physiology, and overall way of life. In the face of an erratic habitat, no better coping mechanism exists than the ability to modify one’s surroundings’.³³ Human evolution is not, therefore, the result of a one-way process of early hominids altering the environment to suit their aims. Evolutionary theory must also emphasise the impact of shifting environmental extremes, and the endurance of a species that was distinctly capable—via a process that Potts terms ‘variability selection’—of establishing for itself how to withstand these extremes.³⁴ In Potts’s recent research we can locate the same principle that Scheler, Gehlen, and even Herder had already identified, the principle that resounds in Heidegger’s comparative examination: that the plasticity of human action should be understood as a response to the sheer abundance of the environment, the vast and dangerous exposure to a plenitude of sensations and possible modes of habituation to the world.

²⁹ For a recent discussion of this idea in the context of zoological research, see Elliott et al. (2013).

³⁰ Potts (1996b: 7).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 11.

³³ Ibid. 12.

³⁴ Ibid. 231.

The concept of world-formation is, therefore, easier to reconcile with aspects of contemporary scientific research than critics of Heidegger's comparative examination seem to imply. As an evolutionary mechanism, the idea that the human world is 'rich'—that is, that it contains a plethora of broad possibilities thanks to a plasticity in the human being's behavioural repertoire—presupposes the precise conception of the human distinctiveness that Heidegger presents in *FCM*. And, rather than celebrating superiority on account of what Potts terms an 'internal property', Heidegger's analysis is grounded in a concept of *physis* itself, not 'the human' as a separate entity that stands in an attitude of grandeur 'over against' *physis* and 'speaks into' it. The human being is envisaged by Heidegger as the conduit of a capacity within *physis* for being 'spoken out', which arises because the human's own form of *physis* includes a metaphysical perspective on *physis*. This perspective enables the process in which the human discloses and, in so doing, aims to enclose *physis* in order to facilitate a feeling of being 'at home' within it. When Herder says, along similar lines, that man's 'forces' of *Besonnenheit* are simply 'his nature', part of the organic order of things, this parallels Potts's observation that the human's 'ability to alter' is 'itself a product of nature, of the environments in which human ancestors lived, and the pace of change in these settings'.³⁵ Potts argues that, as the survivors of the savannah, we humans 'have acquired a ponderous capacity to alter our surroundings and, therefore, to mimic the very processes of environmental change that helped to create us. Our ecological characteristics were honed by vicissitude, not by the static measure of nature we typically adore'.³⁶ This seems to indicate that, within aspects of the scientific approaches of our own time, as well as Heidegger's, we find a method of comparative morphology that delineates between living beings on the basis of the complexity of the world that those beings have access to.

Interweaving Heidegger's Reflections with Anthropo-Biological Insights

The occasionally mystagogical, Romantic element of some of the thinkers I have alluded to, notably Herder and Novalis, may seem to threaten my argument that Heidegger's comparative examination rests on a biologically

³⁵ Ibid. 12.

³⁶ Ibid.

legitimate suite of concepts that do not set out to valorise different beings. If one goes back in history rather than forward to find other examples and explanations of Heidegger's comparative approach, it may look as though his theses are fundamentally retrograde. However, as I have indicated, it is also possible to look ahead to our own scientific epoch for examples and explanations. In *FCM* Heidegger reaches the shores of an understanding of the human as a metaphysically and biologically liminal organism, a being that, as Mulhall says, exists at an 'essentially enigmatic, uncannily intimate distance' from its non-human relatives on account of its openness, an openness that is at once ontological and organic.³⁷

The question of the animal arises in *FCM* within this broader framework of Heidegger's attempt to recover the Greek understanding of the human as a kind of rupture in *physis*. For Heidegger, the question of the animal ultimately leads us back to the enigma of our own position within *physis*, the manner in which we are enfolded into *physis* despite our capacity to speak out of it and attend to beings as such and as a whole. If our animality is not that of the world-poor non-human organism, and yet our form of *physis* is an organic, embodied form, in the sense that we are part of the 'arising and passing-away' of beings that emerge and decay within *physis*, how are we to understand our corporeality?³⁸ What type of 'animality' do human beings have, if indeed they have animality at all? Heidegger does not want to give us an answer to these questions. His entire approach in *FCM* is a critique of the contemporary desire to produce answers to questions when the questions themselves have not yet been understood. His demand in the lecture course is instead that we endure the ambiguity of such ancient philosophical questions, allow ourselves to be deranged and opened up by their depth, and realise that this depth is not effaced by our contemporary troubleshooting and problem-solving tendencies. If we want to make claims about the human form of animality that emerges in *FCM*, we need to regard Heidegger's text as a springboard for a profound discussion, one that offers a series of intriguing waypoints, but not a set of solutions.

Perhaps the most important of these 'waypoints', which we discover when we place the text in dialogue with biology and anthropology, is the realisation that the animal's world-relation is, in an important sense, more stable than our own. Following Heidegger's reading of Uexküll, we see that, though the animal's confinement within an environment determines the limitation

³⁷ Mulhall (2005: 68).

³⁸ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: 25).

of its world, it is precisely this limitation—embodied in its unwitting responsiveness to stimuli—that saves the animal from being metaphysical. It is enough for the animal to have the sharp prehensile grip of a claw or a paw, it does not need *begreifen*. When Heidegger's thinking on the human/animal distinction becomes more uncompromising in later works, in which he appears to be more concerned with ontological difference and less interested in examining the meaning of *Umwelt* and the nature of animal world-poverty, we can still see evidence of this conception of the human as peculiarly liberated from both the confines and the safeguards of an environment. In *Being and Truth* Heidegger remarks that the human 'understands the environment *as* environment' and 'is thereby able to *master* it and *form* it'.³⁹ Once again, what may escape our notice here is that the animal *need not* form or master its environment because it need not understand its environment *as* an environment. So where does the 'privilege' lie? With the entity that has the ability to build and create something that it lacks, or the entity that lacks the ability but already possesses what it needs, rendering the ability superfluous? We still have a hierarchical picture of things, but it is not one that simplistically celebrates human existence. Heidegger may be placing the animal on the other side of an abyss, but it is the human—the metaphysical being—that has, as it were, to look into the abyss, that has to 'deal with' the abyss. It is in this regard that the controversial passages on animality in *FCM* take us to the threshold of our own form of life, our own connection to *physis*. The abyss that Heidegger refers to is both part of *Dasein*, the being that incorporates an 'absence' in its 'essence', and one that we are drawn into when we attempt to work through the very question that his lecture course poses concerning the human being's uncannily complex relation to life.⁴⁰

How should we develop the insights from *FCM* if we wish to gain a deeper understanding of our own form of life, our own 'animality'? The concept that Heidegger adapts from Novalis of metaphysics as a *drive* to be at home everywhere, suggests that there is something drive-like, something impulsively animalistic about metaphysics. It is as if metaphysics—the great edifices of meaning that we build, which give way to social structures, cultural norms, institutions, and so on—are the human version of the organic urges that govern animal life. Drawing on the tradition of comparative ethology and philosophical anthropology, as well as Heidegger's

³⁹ Heidegger (2001 [1933–4]: §22, p. 137).

⁴⁰ Heidegger (1995 [1929–30]: §76, p. 366).

reflections on the world-poverty of the animal, I think we can piece together a view of the human that is ontologically and morphologically rich. Sloterdijk's description of the parity and complex interweaving of the anthropo-biological perspective and Heidegger's ostensibly highly abstract account of the being of *Dasein* can, I think, assist us here:

Because of his shattered animality, the indeterminate being falls out of the environment and manages to develop a world in an ontological sense. Man was destined from the cradle for this ek-static coming-into-the-world and orientation toward *Being*, the legacy of his evolutionary history. If man is in the world it is because he belongs to a movement that brought him to the world and set him in it. He is the product of a super-birth that created from a nursling a worldling.⁴¹

This interweaving does, I think, represent a genuine possibility of retaining Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* without excluding more naturalistic insights that Heidegger himself rejects. The result is a view of the human as a world-open being that is unhinged from strict natural impulses. A kind of metaphysical ape. This being must, as Ortega phrases it, make do without the animal's 'sommolence' and live in a state of 'permanent wakefulness' that is 'at times terrible and uncontrollable'.⁴² Ortega describes this peculiarity in the human as it is presented in philosophical anthropology as the most 'anti-natural' and yet 'ultra-biological' of phenomena.⁴³ What looks like discontinuity with life is in fact a distinct mode of continuity. In the end, the uncomfortable message that we can draw from Heidegger's concept of the metaphysical abyss, and from the life sciences with which he engages, is not, as his critics have suggested, that the animal is denied a world. For, once we attend to the context of the biology that was contemporaneous with the lecture course, we see that the animal thesis articulates what was then a prevailing biological observation concerning the animal's interaction with its environment that was part of a response to Darwinism. The ruthless message of the comparative examination is, in fact, the notion that the human does not have what Uexküll terms the 'certainty' of an *Umwelt*.⁴⁴

The enduring claim that punctuates Heidegger's work is that the human-animal relation is 'scarcely conceivable' and does not lend itself to unambiguous rankings and neat classifications of any kind.⁴⁵ The comparative

⁴¹ Sloterdijk (2009: 20).

⁴² Ortega y Gasset (2002: 164).

⁴³ Ibid. 166.

⁴⁴ Uexküll (2010 [1934]: 51).

⁴⁵ Heidegger (1977 [1946]: 230).

examination is investigative and interrogative, designed to get us to appraise metaphysical principles that are buried in the recesses of contemporary thinking. It aims, not at the *institution* of hierarchical principles, but at the *indication* of ones to which we are already held fast.

Is there a way, building on this critical project, to establish fresh insights into the human–animal relation? Is it possible to unify the human's openness to being with its embodiment without any residue of a Cartesian 'life "plus" metaphysical capacity' model, or are we simply left with a gaping perplexity? At the very least, I think all of the material I have examined leaves us with an invocation to re-establish an intrigue about contemporary categorisations of beings and modes of thinking that we have come to take for granted. Heidegger's greatest achievement in the lecture course is to set these principles adrift and renew our sense of curiosity in them.

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